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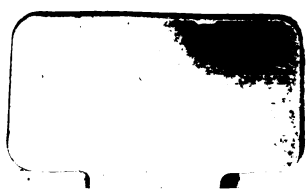

A

DEFENCE

OF

Reveal'd Religion.

A

A DEFENCE OF Reveal'd Religion

AGAINST

The EXCEPTIONS of a late Writer, in his Book, Intituled,

Chriſtianity as Old as the Creation, &c.

By JOHN CONYBEARE, D.D.
Rector of *Exeter-College* in OXFORD.

Nunc parvulos nobis dedit igniculos, quos celeriter malis moribus opinionibuſque depravati ſic reſtinguimus, ut nuſquam natura lumen appareat: Sunt enim ingeniis noſtris ſemina innata virtutum; quæ ſi adoleſcere liceret, ipſa nos ad beatam vitam natura perduceret. Nunc autem, ſimul atque editi in lucem & ſuſcepti ſumus, in omni continuò pravitate, & in ſummâ opinionum perverſitate verſamur: ut pene cum lacte nutricis errorem ſuxiſſe videamur.

Cicer. Diſp. Tuſcul. Ed. Dav. Cant. 1723. p. 166.

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TO THE

Right Reverend Father in GOD,

EDMUND

LORD BISHOP of LONDON.

My LORD,

THE following Work humbly craves Your Lordſhip's Acceptance; to whom I ſhould be induc'd to addreſs it, from the Nature of the Deſign, and Your Lordſhip's great Concern for the Intereſts of

of Religion, tho' I had not been oblig'd to do ſo, in Acknowledgment of many perſonal Favours receiv'd from Your Lordſhip.

Indeed the Book itſelf owes its Birth to Your Lordſhip's Encouragement; in which if I have not ſucceeded according to my Wiſhes, I may plead that it was drawn up amidſt a Variety of Interruptions, and under a bad State of Health. This will in ſome Sort excuſe the Author, tho' it may detract from the Performance.

But the Cauſe I am defending will receive leſs Prejudice from the Defects of inferior Advocates, when it is conſider'd in how Maſterly a Way Your Lordſhip hath already ſupported it. The principal Queſtions in this Controverſy have been determin'd in Your Lord-

Lordſhip's PASTORAL LETTERS, *to the Satisfaction of every reaſonable Enquirer; in which we ſee with Pleaſure how much additional Force Argument receives, when it is manag'd with Temper.*

How different is the Conduct of our Adverſaries! in whoſe Writings nothing is more remarkable than an entire Contempt of Decency: Fit Method to be us'd in ſo bad a Cauſe!

But, let our Adverſaries go on in their own Way; Truth will maintain itſelf notwithſtanding: And that which could ſupport itſelf under Ten dreadful Perſecutions, is not to be born down at this Time of Day by hard Words. Religion will enlarge its Credit, whilſt it is defended by Your Lordſhip's Pen, and illuſtrated by Your Example.

I ſhall

DEDICATION.

I ſhall add no more, but my ſincereſt Wiſhes for Your Lordſhip's Happineſs and long Life; and in this I wiſh one of the greateſt Bleſſings which can happen to this Church and Nation.

Permit me to ſubſcribe myſelf,

Your LORDSHIP'S

moſt dutiful,

moſt devoted,

humble Servant,

MAY 4th, 1732.

JOHN CONYBEARE.

A

DEFENCE

OF

Reveal'd Religion, &c.

WHEN the Chriſtian Religion was firſt propagated, St. *Peter* gave this Direction; That the Profeſſors of it ſhould be conſtantly prepar'd both to defend and to prove their Faith. *Be ready* (ſaith he,) *always to give an Anſwer to every Man that asketh you a Reaſon of the Hope that is in you with Meekneſs and Fear.* 1 Pet. iii. 15.

It could not be expected, in the common Courſe of Things, but Queſtions of this Nature would ariſe, when a Syſtem was propos'd different from what had obtain'd be-

fore; and, in many Points, entirely inconſiſtent with Matters which had been reckon'd ſacred. Every Man therefore was concern'd to be furniſh'd with apt Matter of Reply, as well for the Security of his own Faith, as the Conviction of others.

What Regard was paid to this Apoſtolical Injunction, may fairly be concluded from the mighty Progreſs of this Religion. It is certain and known Matter of Fact, that within the Compaſs of a few Years it ſpread itſelf through a great Part of the World: It was receiv'd, notwithſtanding the Prejudices of Education, and Oppoſitions of The Civil Power: The Grounds and Reaſons of it were made ſo apparent, that Men of all Circumſtances embrac'd it: And its Conqueſts were ſtill carried on farther, 'till at length it gain'd on thoſe Powers which had hitherto oppos'd it.

When theſe Difficulties were gotten over, and Chriſtianity was become the general and eſtabliſh'd Profeſſion; after it had paſs'd thro' all Tryals, and approv'd itſelf to the Judgment of every impartial Man, one might hope there would be no farther Occaſion to enter into thoſe Points, which had been debated in the more early Ages: At leaſt, that after a Poſſeſſion of almoſt Seventeen Hundred Years, during which Time our Claim had been maintain'd by the ſtrongeſt Force of Argument, we ſhould not be call'd upon

to

to begin anew, and to ſet forth the Original Title by which we hold.

Had indeed our Cauſe been carried on in a ſuſpicious Manner; never fairly decided; but ſupported merely by Artifice, and the Miſapplication of Civil Force; there might have been ſome Reaſon to call us back, and to put us upon proving thoſe Matters, which hitherto had not been prov'd at all. But as every thing of real Moment in this Cauſe, --- every thing which could afford juſt Ground of Debate, hath, ſome Time or other, been thoroughly ſifted, and fully ſettled, it ſurely becomes Matter of Complaint that theſe Things are any more brought in Queſtion; That the Miniſters of The Goſpel are interrupted in diſcharging a main Part of their Office; --- are call'd off from inſtructing their People in the Doctrines and Duties of Chriſtianity; --- and oblig'd to guard them, as well as they may, againſt a total Revolt from this Religion.

Yet This is in Truth the Caſe. More hath of late Years been attempted this Way than in many former Ages. Several Methods have been us'd to this Purpoſe by different Perſons: And, as ſoon as One Scheme hath been defeated, we have ſeen a new one advanc'd with equal Aſſurance, and recommended with equal Diligence.

I ſhall not concern myſelf at preſent with thoſe Performances, which have been prin-

cipally levell'd at the external Proofs of our Religion. Theſe have been thoroughly examin'd by ſeveral Learned and Good Men. And tho' it cannot but prove Matter of Grief, that a Cauſe ſo important ſhould meet with any kind of Oppoſition, yet we have this Comfort however, that ſome Advantages have ariſen to us from this very Oppoſition. The Grounds of our Holy Faith have been hereby more diſtinctly conſider'd: And, I hope, we are the more firm Believers from obſerving how much our Adverſaries have fail'd in their Attempts againſt us.

Hitherto, for the moſt Part, Objections have been pointed, Either, at the Prophecies, (which, 'tis affirm'd, have been impertinently alledg'd on our Side;) Or, at the Miracles, (which, 'tis pretended, were never really and in Fact wrought;) Or, at ſome particular Doctrines, (which our Adverſaries have thought fit to reject as impoſſible.) At length a Gentleman appears, reſolv'd to carry the Matter farther. Not content to reſt the Controverſy on a common Foot, he boldly undertakes what few have been adventurous enough to maintain before him: And, beſides what he alledges, in ſome Parts of his Book, againſt the Facts or Tradition of The Goſpel, he directs his chief Aim at the Foundation of the Whole.

His grand Deſign, is, To prove, that there neither hath been, nor poſſibly can be any Revelation

Revelation at all: And the main Principle on which he builds, is This; That the Light of common Reaſon is abundantly ſufficient without it. Revelation, he maintains, can teach us nothing, which every Man's Reaſon might not as perfectly teach him before. From hence he would have us conclude, that all Information this Way muſt be entirely ſuperfluous; utterly unworthy of God, becauſe uſeleſs and unprofitable to Man.

Were there really none Occaſion for The Interpoſition of The Supreme Being to ſupport and carry on the Affairs of Religion; and could this Negative be fully made appear, we ſhould be forc'd to give up our Cauſe. For, a perfectly wiſe Being cannot act in vain. Whenever He interpoſes, ſomething is intended worthy of his Care, and which cannot be ſo well obtain'd without it.

But then, it lies on our Adverſaries to make full Proof of this Point, "That a Re-"velation cannot poſſibly be of any Ser-"vice to us." They ſhould ſhew, that no important Doctrine can poſſibly be inculcated this Way, which might not be as well deduc'd from the Principles of *human* Reaſon; —— no Precepts given, which Men were not equally concern'd to obſerve before; —— nothing of any kind declar'd, which every Man could not perfectly and eaſily diſcover without this Aid; —— no Means, no Aſ-

ſiſtances, no Enforcements with Regard to a virtuous Life afforded, which did not lie clearly before Men's Minds antecedently to any Revelation about them. All theſe Particulars, beſides ſeveral others of a like Nature, ought to be evinc'd beyond Exception: And whether The Gentleman I am now concern'd with hath ſucceeded in this, is the Point in Queſtion.

It may not be improper to repreſent This Gentleman's Scheme ſomewhat more diſtinctly; the principal Branches of which, are, I conceive, truly expreſs'd in the following Propoſitions.

Prop. 1. God always intended Men ſhould have ſome Religion.

2. This Religion is the Religion of Nature.

3. The Religion of Nature is abſolutely perfect.

4. As ſuch, it muſt be immutable; neither capable of having any of its Precepts cancell'd, nor of receiving any additional Precepts.

5. Therefore, if any Revelation be vouchſafed us, it muſt entirely fall in with The Religion of Nature.

6. This Religion of Nature is eaſily, and perfectly diſcoverable by every Man, even by thoſe of the meaneſt Capacity.

7. It is more eaſily, and more perfectly diſcoverable by every Man, than either the Proof or Meaning of any Revelation can be.

From

From whence he would have us infer;

8. That a Revelation is perfectly needleſs, and ſuperfluous.

I do by no Means affirm that every thing advanc'd by This Gentleman, in the Performance now before me, is indeed reducible to the foregoing Propoſitions; but only, that they contain the principal Branches of his Scheme; that they give us a real View both of the End he aims at, and the ſeveral Steps by which he purſues this End. This is all which I think myſelf concern'd with here: And if I can ſucceed ſo far as to ſupport the Cauſe of Religion againſt the Attempts made on it in theſe ſeveral Articles, I ſhall gain what I contend for; and this Work will anſwer the Title I have ſet before it.

As I have already unfolded the Scheme which I deſign to examine, and by reducing it to a few Propoſitions have brought it into View at once; ſo it will be equally proper for me to give the Reader ſome Inſight into the Particulars of mine own Management.

I propoſe therefore to give ſome Satisfaction to the following Enquiries;

1. What we are to underſtand by The Law or Religion of Nature; From whence the Obligation of it ariſes; and how far it extends.

2. Whether This Religion of Nature be abſolutely perfect.

3. Whether it be immutable, in ſuch a Senſe as to be incapable of admitting any additional Precepts.

Under this Head I ſhall handle the Caſe of Poſitive Precepts in Matters of Religion.

4. Whether Natural, and Reveal'd Religion be neceſſarily One and the ſame; and if not, wherein the proper Diſtinction between them doth conſiſt.

5. Whether a proper Rule of Life be eaſily, and perfectly diſcoverable by every Man, even by thoſe of the meaneſt Capacity.

6. Whether it be more eaſily, and more perfectly diſcoverable by every Man, than the Proof, or Meaning of any Revelation can be.

7. Whether a Revelation be not expedient in order to a more eaſy, more perfect, and more general Knowledge of this Rule of Life.

8. Whether a Revelation be not expedient in order to enforce the general Practice of this Rule.

To which I ſhall add,

Laſtly, Whether there be ſufficient Grounds to believe the Reality of a Revelation, and eſpecially of the Chriſtian.

My Deſign being thus far explain'd, I ſhall now purſue theſe ſeveral Particulars in their proper Order.

CHAP.

CHAP. I.

What we are to underſtand by The Law, or Religion of Nature; From whence the Obligation of it ariſes; and how far it extends.

THE *Law of Nature*, and The *Religion of Nature* are Terms promiſcuouſly us'd by this Gentleman; and ſo far as this I follow him readily. Only thus much ſhould be obſerv'd, that all along, when I ſpeak of Religion, I would be underſtood to include as well the Doctrines as the Precepts of it: Which Doctrines being not merely ſpeculative, but having a greater or leſs Influence on Practice, ſhould be conſider'd, Either as Principles from which moral Rules follow as Concluſions; or, as Means, by attending to which Men are encourag'd to moral Duties. Theſe are not peculiar to Reveal'd Religion, but make a conſiderable Part even of Natural.

I know

I know a Diſtinction is uſually made between Doctrines and Duties; and a Diſtinction there doubtleſs is between them. Yet ſtill it ſhould be remember'd how cloſely they are connected together; and that many of theſe Duties themſelves cannot be perceiv'd diſtinctly, or diſcharg'd advantageouſly without the Belief and Influence of theſe Doctrines. Men are concern'd therefore to ſearch out and to diſcover ſuch Points, as far as they are by them diſcoverable; To render them familiar to their Minds, when diſcover'd; To purſue them thro' all their proper Conſequences; and to ſuffer them to have ſuch an Effect on their Conduct and Behaviour as they have a direct Tendency to produce.

To proceed; The Term *Religion* may be conſider'd, Either as it ſignifies that comprehenſive Rule, to which we ſhould conform our Sentiments and Actions, in reference to God and Man; or elſe, as it implies the inward and habitual Senſe we have of theſe Matters on our Minds. Our Author in different Places uſes this Term in each of theſe different Senſes. But, to avoid Confuſion, I ſhall confine myſelf to the former; ſince we are now debating about the Rule itſelf, and enquiring "What Syſtem of "Doctrines and Precepts we ought to em-"brace as our Religion."

Having

Having ſettled this Term, I am to obſerve, in the next Place, That the *Law*, or *Religion of Nature* is ſo call'd, Either, becauſe it is founded in the Reaſon and Nature of Things; or elſe, becauſe it is diſcoverable by us in the Uſe and Exerciſe of thoſe Faculties which we enjoy. The Religion of Nature, as it is conſider'd in theſe different Views, will import quite different Things. In the former, it ſignifies a Perfect Collection of all thoſe moral Doctrines and Precepts which have a Foundation in the Reaſon and Nature of Things: But in the latter, it is ſuch a Collection only, as may be diſcover'd by us in the Exerciſe of our proper Faculties, according to the Means and Opportunities we enjoy.

Our Author was aware of theſe ſeveral Senſes of the Term. He hath noted and obſerv'd them both: But then he hath proceeded ſo unhappily, that whilſt in the Beginning of his Work he defines it in One Senſe, the Courſe of his Argument moſt plainly requires Another Senſe: And in ſome Places he expreſly, and in Words, gives it a Meaning different from what he had before deliver'd in his Definition of the Term. I ſhall confirm this Remark by ſome Citations from this Author's Performance.

He begins his Second Chapter with an Explication of what he means by *The Religion of Nature*. "By *Natural Religion*, ſaith he, "I underſtand the Belief of the Exiſtence

" of a God; and the Senſe and Practice of " thoſe Duties, which reſult from the Know- " ledge we by OUR REASON have of " him and his Perfections; and of ourſelves, " and our own Imperfections, and of the Re- " lation we ſtand in to him and our Fellow " Creatures." *P.* 13. According to this Account, Natural Religion can reach no farther than Natural Light and Reaſon can carry us: For it comprehends under it thoſe Duties only, which reſult from the Knowledge we *by our Reaſon* have of God, and his Perfections, *&c.*

Yet, notwithſtanding this plain Expreſſion of his Meaning, he immediately ſubjoins, " So that the Religion of Nature takes in " every thing that is founded in the Reaſon " and Nature of Things." —— What! doth the Religion of Nature take in every thing that is founded in the Reaſon and Nature of Things, when, according to this Gentleman's own Account, it reaches no farther than we *by our Reaſon* are able to carry it? And if it reaches no farther than we *by our Reaſon* can carry it, doth it therefore follow, that it takes in every thing which is founded in the Nature and Reaſon of Things? I know but one Way to get over this Difficulty; *viz.* by aſſerting roundly, that *Human Reaſon* is commenſurate to all Truth; and that we *by our Reaſon* are capable of diſcovering every thing which is founded in the Nature and Reaſons of Things.

This

This is not the only Place in which this Gentleman hath adventur'd to give us different Accounts of the Religion of Nature. Thus, *P.* 376. he aſſerts, "The Law of "Nature is nothing but what the Light of "Nature, or Reaſon dictates." And yet, he had maintain'd before, *P.* 114. "That Na-"tural Religion takes in all thoſe Duties, "which flow from the Nature and Reaſon "of Things; and the Relation we ſtand in "to God and our Fellow-Creatures." The former Account, he ſaw plainly, would by no Means anſwer his Purpoſe. He could not prove the Law, or Religion of Nature to be, in That Senſe, an *abſolutely perfect* Law. A fundamental Point in the Scheme he was upon could not receive the leaſt Appearance of Support, but from this other Notion of the Law of Nature. He varies therefore his Account of this Point, as may beſt ſerve a preſent Purpoſe. He defines it in one Senſe; and then reaſons, and concludes from it in another.

In order to State this Matter more truly, and to ſettle the proper Notion of The Law, or Religion of Nature, (as it bears a Part in the preſent Queſtion,) I ſhall diſtinctly conſider it in both the Views already mention'd.

The firſt Senſe, is This; It ſignifies a perfect Collection of all thoſe moral Doctrines, and Precepts, which have a real Foundation in

in the Nature and Reaſon of Things. This is what the preſent *R. R.* Lord Biſhop of *Bangor* muſt be underſtood to intend, when he calls it "That Original Religion, which "was as Old as the Creation." [*Sermon before the Society for Propagating the Goſpel*, p. 13.] and afterwards, when he tells us, "That [Chriſt] came into the World, not "merely to reſtore the Religion of Nature, "but to adapt it to the State and Condition "of Man; and to ſupply the Defects Not "of Religion, which continued in its firſt "Purity, and Perfection, but of Nature." *p.* 20. If by *Religion of Nature* His Lordſhip had not intended ſuch a perfect Collection of all thoſe moral Truths, and Precepts, which I have mention'd above, He would never have aſſerted, that this Religion [ſtill] continued in its firſt Purity and Perfection; and that our Bleſſed Saviour did not come to ſupply the Defects of It, but of Nature.

The Term is us'd in the ſame Senſe by another very Learned Writer; who, (in his Diſcourſe concerning *The Nature, Obligation, and Efficacy of the Chriſtian Sacraments*, p. 9.) tells us, "That many the Scripture Duties "which we have otherwiſe no Knowledge "of, are yet juſtly referr'd to the Law of "Nature; ſince Scripture hath diſcover'd "what Foundation they have in the Nature "and Truth of Things."

Our

Our Author himſelf, as I obſerv'd juſt now, hath, in ſeveral Parts of his Performance, conſider'd the Law or Religion of Nature in this View; and pretended to draw Concluſions from it, taken in this Senſe, in Prejudice of Divine Revelation.

In Oppoſition to what he maintains I ſhall therefore obſerve,

1. That this Notion is entirely wrong, as us'd and apply'd by this Writer. And,

2. Were it the true one, yet it will not come up to his Purpoſe; nor really ſupport the Concluſions he draws from it.

Firſt then, this Notion, as apply'd by the preſent Writer, is wrong. He tells us, that "Natural and Reveal'd Religion differ only "as to the Manner of their being com-"municated." *p.* 5. ——That, "the Divine "Precepts muſt be the ſame, whether inter-"nally or externally reveal'd:" *p.* 9. And it is the great Deſign of his whole Performance to prove, that an external Revelation is needleſs, becauſe every thing, in which we can poſſibly have any Concern, is comprehended under That Law or Religion, which is founded in Nature, and as Old as the Creation. I would obſerve from hence, That Natural and Reveal'd Religion are here both of them ſuppoſed to be *communicated*; ——That the Divine Precepts (as he terms them) in both, are ſuppoſed to be equally *reveal'd*, in the one *internally*, in the other *externally*;

externally; —— and, that to prove an external Revelation needleſs, becauſe every thing we can have any Concern in, is comprehended under That Law which is founded in Nature, muſt evidently imply, that we do, or may know what is contain'd under that Law: Otherwiſe an external Revelation may be highly ſerviceable in order to diſcover thoſe Matters, which cannot be known without it; and ſo the Concluſion which he draws, will not ſeem to have the leaſt Relation to the Principle laid down.

Natural Religion therefore muſt ſignify Such a Collection of Doctrines and Precepts, as is diſcoverable by us in the Uſe of our natural Faculties. It cannot include every thing which is founded in the Reaſon and Nature of Things, unleſs every thing ſo founded is by us diſcoverable. And tho' it ſhould be allow'd, that every thing of that Kind is really diſcoverable by us, yet ſtill theſe Matters will conſtitute the Law or Religion of Nature, *i. e.* will be *to us* The Law of Nature, Not merely as ſounded in the Nature of Things, but as we have Abilities to diſcover that they are ſo.

Every one knows that Promulgation is eſſential to a Law. Nothing therefore can, ſtrictly ſpeaking, be Part of a Law, which is incapable of being known to be ſuch. And tho' human Magiſtrates content themſelves with making a publick Declaration of their

their Will, and do not enter into the particular Opportunities of each ſingle Perſon to diſcern it, yet the Caſe is otherwiſe with regard to the Supreme Being. Ignorance may be pleaded in a human Court, in Caſes, where Men cannot poſſibly judge concerning the Truth and Reaſonableneſs of the Plea. They are oblig'd therefore to ſet all Pretences of this Kind aſide; and ſometimes to lay Hardſhips on the Innocent, that they may not give too many Advantages to the Guilty. But God knows thoroughly the Capacities and Opportunities of all his Subjects. To him therefore are they accountable for their Conformity to thoſe Rules only, which they did know, or might have known to be his Will: For Things entirely out of their Reach, are, with regard to them, no Matters of Law, and carry with them no Obligation at all.

If this be not thought ſo clear, as to ſuperſede all Occaſion of Proof whatſoever, let us only conſider, upon what Account it is, that Brutes are exempted from moral Obligation, and the Reſtraints of Law. It is not, that a certain Rule and Meaſure of Action would not really add to the Happineſs they enjoy at preſent, or better ſecure their Enjoyments to them. It is not, that they are abſolutely unfurniſh'd with natural Powers of doing any thing, either to promote each other's Good, or to prevent each other's Miſ-

chief, on any Occaſion whatſoever. No; This is far from being the real State of the Caſe. But the Point reſts here: They are not endu'd with ſuch Meaſures, and Degrees of Reaſon, as may enable them to judge concerning the Cauſes and Conſequences of Things. They are neither capable of forming to themſelves a Rule; nor of diſcovering a Law-giver; nor of having the Rule enforc'd on them by the Proſpect of future Good or Ill. They neither know a God, nor can diſcern his Will at all. Now, if Brutes are Therefore exempt from all Law whatſoever, becauſe they are abſolutely incapable of knowing it; what Concluſion can we draw from hence but This, That all other Beings are juſt ſo far oblig'd, as they, in their Circumſtances, are capable of knowing a Law; or, in other Words, that nothing can poſſibly become Matter of Law to any one, which he is abſolutely incapable of knowing.

Let us aſcend from Brutes to Men. Ideots, and Mad-men are likewiſe exempt from moral Obligation; and treated as Perſons entirely unaccountable even by Civil Powers, in all thoſe Caſes, where the Want of Reaſon is clear, and indiſputable. But whence, I pray, doth this ariſe? Is it not built on this Principle, that no one is accountable for not conforming his Actions to a Rule entirely above his Comprehenſion?

Once more; I would deſire to know, How far Children, in their more tender Years, may be reckon'd as moral Agents. At firſt not at all; no more than even Brutes themſelves. They are put under juſt the ſame Reſtraints as Brutes are; and by no Means left to their own Conduct or Diſcretion. As Reaſon opens, and proper Rules are ſuggeſted to them, which they are able to diſcern, and to retain, they become gradually accountable; They are ſo far ſtrictly and properly oblig'd: And, as Reaſon is ſtill farther improv'd, and more learnt, their Obligations are enlarg'd: 'Till, at length, when they come to Maturity, they are freed from the ordinary Reſtraints of Diſcipline; are turn'd over to their own Conduct; and conſider'd on the ſame Foot with other Men. But, whence all this? Whence is it that Law and Obligation do not commence with our very Being; but are gradually enlarg'd, in Proportion to thoſe Degrees of Reaſon which we acquire? The Caſe is plain enough: Obligation cannot reach farther than a Capacity of Knowledge; and Law cannot be extended farther than Obligation itſelf reaches. To ſuppoſe a Law, in regard to us, without a Capacity of diſcerning it, is altogether as abſurd, as to make Things impoſſible the Subject, and Matter of Law.

Our Author himſelf is not inſenſible of this; For he tells us, *p.* 4. That "a Law,

" as far as it is unintelligible, ceaſes to be a " Law." What therefore he calls The Law of Nature, muſt, with reſpect to us, ceaſe to be a Law any farther than it is by us intelligible; or, (as I ſhould rather chuſe to expreſs it,) any farther than it is by us diſcoverable in the Uſe of Reaſon.

I cannot but obſerve, as I go along, our Author's Conduct on this Point. He tells us,

" God hath given Men a Law.

" This Law is The Law of Nature.

" This Law of Nature takes in every " thing founded in the Reaſon and Nature " of Things.

" Therefore, Every thing founded in the " Reaſon and Nature of Things muſt be by " us diſcoverable.

" Otherwiſe, This Law of Nature will " ceaſe to be a Law.

" For nothing can be a Law which is un- " intelligible."

Let us only aſſume this laſt Principle as undoubtedly true, (and our Author will allow us thus much, ſince he hath plainly laid it down himſelf,) the Conſequence from hence is clear; If we are not capable of diſcovering every thing which is founded in the Reaſon and Nature of Things; then, ſuch a perfect Collection of Precepts, *&c.* as was mention'd before, is not properly The Law of Nature.

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It is true indeed, our Author maintains, that every thing of that Kind is diſcoverable by us: And the Cauſe why it is not in Fact diſcovered, is only This; Men will not make Uſe of their Reaſon for thoſe Purpoſes for which it might and ought to ſerve. But to Aſſert is one Thing, and to Prove is another. Surely This will not paſs for a firſt and ſelf-evident Principle. Something therefore ought to be alledg'd in Support of a Point, which the Generality of Mankind will be very apt to queſtion.

Now, what is alledg'd by our Author to this Purpoſe, is This; "If God hath given "Mankind a Law, he muſt in like Manner "have given them ſufficient Means of know-"ing it; He would otherwiſe have defeat-"ed his own Intent in giving it." *p.* 4. The Conſequence I allow; and that for the Reaſon immediately ſubjoin'd, that "a Law as "far as it is unintelligible ceaſes to be a "Law." The Gentleman's Error therefore lies in This: He firſt ſuppoſes a certain Law given; and then proper Means afforded for diſcovering this Law; whereas, in Truth, *To give a Law*; *To promulge it*; or *To afford Means of knowing it*, do ſignify one and the ſame Thing. What we are capable of diſcovering to be fit and reaſonable; and conſequently, to be the Will of God, is to us a Law: What we cannot ſo diſcover, is to us no Law: And if we cannot, in the mere Uſe

of Reaſon, diſcover every thing which is founded in the real Truth and Nature of Things, then a perfect Collection of that Kind, is not the Law of Nature. The Argument therefore, which our Author here produces, amounts to nothing: It leaves the Point juſt as it found it: And we muſt try, from other Conſiderations, whether Men have really ſufficient natural Abilities, and Opportunities to diſcover every thing which is founded in Nature.

The ſame kind of Reaſoning, which I have noted above, occurs again, *p.* 5. I ſhall beg Leave to tranſcribe the whole Paſſage, becauſe I may find Occaſion of Advantage from a particular Sentence; in which, (though he intended it as a Guard,) he hath ſuggeſted ſomething, not very conſiſtent either with his general Deſign, or the particular Argument he is there repreſenting. "If, ſaith "he, God never intended Mankind ſhould "at any time be without a Religion, or have "falſe Religions; and there be but One true "Religion, which all Men have been ever "bound to believe and profeſs; I cannot "ſee any Heterodoxy in affirming, that the "Means to effect this End of infinite Wiſ-"dom muſt be as univerſal and extenſive as "the End itſelf; Or, that all Men, at all "Times, muſt have had ſufficient Means to "diſcover whatever God deſign'd They ſhould "know and practiſe. *I do not mean by this, that*

"*all*

"*all ſhould have equal Knowledge, but that* "*all ſhould have what is ſufficient for the Cir-* "*cumſtances they are in.*" The Argument carry'd on in this Paſſage is the ſame with that inſiſted on juſt before, tho' our Author hath thought fit to give it a Turn ſomewhat different in the Expreſſion. In the former Way of Repreſentation, he ſuppoſes a Law actually given; and then infers, that God muſt have given ſufficient Means of knowing it. Here he ſuppoſes, that God always intended Men ſhould have ſome Religion; which Religion he farther ſuppoſes can be but One; from hence likewiſe he infers, that all Men, at all Times, muſt have had ſufficient Means to diſcover it.

To give a Law; —— *To give a Religion*; and *To intend Men ſhould have a Religion*, are Expreſſions which muſt be interpreted in one and the ſame Senſe. And the Law, or Religion which this Author affirms God gave Men, and intended they ſhould have, is repreſented by him as abſolutely perfect, and containing under it every thing which is founded in the Reaſon and Nature of Things. He concludes from hence, If infinite Wiſdom hath appointed this End, then the Means to effect it muſt be as univerſal as the End itſelf.

I have remark'd on this Argument already; and therefore ſhall only obſerve farther, that the following Paſſage, which is intended by

this Gentleman as a Guard to ſave himſelf, entirely deſtroys the Deſign he is upon, and the Argument he hath produc'd. "I do not, ſaith "he, mean by this, That all ſhould have "equal Knowledge; but that all ſhould "have ſufficient for the Circumſtances they "are in." But, by this Gentleman's Leave, if God gave Men a Religion, or intended they ſhou'd have a Religion; if this Religion contains under it every thing which is founded in the Reaſon and Nature of Things; and, if all Men, at all Times, muſt have ſufficient Means of diſcovering this Religion; —— They muſt likewiſe have ſufficient Means of diſcovering every thing which is founded in the Nature and Reaſon of Things. It follows from hence, that all Men muſt have the Means and Opportunities of *equal Knowledge*: I do not ſay, They muſt have equal Knowledge, but only the *Means* of it; which Means they may, if they pleaſe, neglect. It is in this Senſe our Author ought to be underſtood, tho' he hath expreſs'd himſelf in an improper Manner. "All Men, ſaith he, muſt have "*ſufficient Means* to diſcover whatever God "deſign'd, *&c.*——" Then it follows,—— "I "don't mean that all ſhould have *equal* "*Knowledge*, [the Courſe of his Argument requires it ſhould be *the Means of equal Knowledge*,] but that all ſhould have ſuffi-"cient for the Circumſtances they are in." How conſiſtent this is with the Argument

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he is here upon, The Gentleman is concern'd to ſhew.

Hitherto I have obſerv'd, that we neither are, nor poſſibly can be oblig'd to any thing, for the Knowledge of which we want either Abilities, or Opportunity; and conſequently, That the Law, or Religion of Nature, taken in that Senſe, in which it ought to be underſtood in the preſent Debate, muſt ſignify Such a Syſtem, as Man may, in the due Uſe of his natural Faculties, diſcover. Whether Theſe will reach to every Thing founded in the real Nature and Reaſon of Things, comes now to be conſider'd more diſtinctly.

Our Author endeavours to diſcover what is founded in the Nature and Reaſon of Things, by conſidering — The Exiſtence, and Perfections of God; — The Nature, and Imperfections of ourſelves; — and, The Relation we ſtand in to God, and our Fellow-Creatures. [See *Chapter* 2.] To which he ought to have added one Thing farther, *viz.* The Nature of all other Beings with which we have any Concern, and from the Uſe and Application of which we are capable of receiving any conſiderable Advantage, or Prejudice: For, without this, we ſhall be liable to do or omit a great Number of Things of the moſt important Conſequence both to ourſelves and others.

And, firſt, for the Exiſtence and Perfections of God; It is confeſs'd on all Hands that

that ſome Light may be had here. It may be prov'd, That there muſt have been a Firſt, Independent, Eternal Principle; ——— That This Being is every where; ——— knows every thing; ——— is abſolutely Powerful, Wiſe, Juſt, Good, and the like. Things of this Kind may be diſcover'd: And it may be ſhewn likewiſe, That this firſt Being muſt be poſſeſs'd of every real Perfection, in all the Degrees of it which are poſſible. Yet, however certain it be in the general, that every real Perfection muſt neceſſarily belong to God, I queſtion very much whether we are able to diſcover diſtinctly what all theſe Perfections are. I queſtion whether it can be ſafely affirm'd, That as the before-mention'd Attributes, and the like, do belong to God, ſo likewiſe that there are none others beſide Theſe, which belong to him. To know This we muſt have a full and comprehenſive View of all Perfection; —— of every thing which can deſerve that Character. But if we fail here, as we are deficient in our Knowledge of the Nature of Things, ſo muſt we likewiſe be of their ſeveral Reſults and Conſequences; and therefore ſhall be unable, by our Reaſon, to diſcover every thing that is founded in the Natures and Reaſons of Things.

Again; As to thoſe Perfections which may be prov'd to belong to God, I doubt much whether we have any adequate and compleat

compleat Ideas of them. This perhaps will readily be allow'd me with regard to his natural Perfections: And if it be diſputed in reference to thoſe which are of a Moral Kind, I would only deſire to obſerve, that however fully we may be ſuppos'd to underſtand what theſe Attributes mean, yet there muſt be ſeveral other Things likewiſe diſcover'd in order to know How they will be exercis'd on emergent Occaſions. Thus, ſuppoſing it ſtrictly demonſtrable that God is Juſt and Good; and that the full Import of theſe Attributes is likewiſe known; yet we muſt know what is, in every Caſe, Juſt and Good, before we can determine in what Manner God muſt act or conduct himſelf; and conſequently, what may be moſt fitting for Creatures to expect, or do, on ſuch Occaſions. Here therefore we are incompetent Judges of Matters founded on the Natures and Reaſons of Things.

Once more; We do, or may know, That there is a God; and that This God can be but One. There is no Manner of Contradiction in ſuppoſing ſome ſuch Diſtinctions in the Divine Nature as are analogous to perſonal Diſtinctions amongſt Men: And yet, it cannot be prov'd, from any Principles of Human Reaſon, that ſuch Diſtinctions do really ſubſiſt. Now if ſuch do ſubſiſt in Fact; —— and each Perſon, ſo ſubſiſting, hath different Offices, and bears a different Relation to Mankind, then it is apparent there will be ſomething in the

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Divine Nature undiſcoverable by Human Reaſon; —— ſomething, which as ſoon as known, may prove the Foundation of particular and ſpecial Duties. This is what The Chriſtian Religion teaches; and in Conſequence of This, Things are required in this Diſpenſation, which could not be learnt from the mere Reaſonings of our own Minds about them.

The next Thing which our Author conſiders, is, The Nature and Imperfections of ourſelves. Here it might be expected we ſhould have a full View of Matters; for, what can be thoroughly known by us, if we do not know ourſelves? And yet perhaps a great Number of Queſtions may be ſtarted, of which no tolerable Solution can be given; and Queſtions too, from the Determination of which no ſmall Advantage might ariſe.

To explain myſelf a little here; I will conſider Man in theſe Two Reſpects, *viz.* as an Animal endu'd with Senſe and Perception; and likewiſe as endu'd with a Principle of Reaſon. The former he enjoys in common with Brutes, but the latter ſets him above them, and gives him his proper Character and Diſtinction.

In reference to both theſe it muſt be allow'd, that each Man for himſelf is conſcious of what happens to him, or paſſes within him; and we are apt to preſume, that as the general Frame and Make of human Kind is the ſame, ſo the ſame Pleaſures or Pains ariſe

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to different Men from the ſame Impreſſions of external Objects; — That they have equal Capacity of Reaſon and Knowledge; and enjoy or ſuffer alike from the ſame Sentiments of Things. Yet it is moſt certain that there is a vaſt Difference between Men in theſe ſeveral Reſpects; and ſuch, as no Perſon in the World can adjuſt and ſettle. The ſame Things, to different Perſons, may prove either agreeable, or diſagreeable, *i. e.* Good, or Evil: And as we are not entirely acquainted with theſe Particulars, ſo we cannot exactly know How to regulate our own Behaviour towards them.

General Rules may be laid down, *viz.* To do as much Good as we can, — and as little Miſchief as poſſible: Yet ſtill, for want of knowing what is the real State and Condition of each particular Perſon, we may err in the Application of theſe general Rules; and become unavoidably ignorant of ſeveral Matters, which have a real Ground in the Natures and Reaſons of Things.

I have obſerv'd before, that Men, notwithſtanding they are Reaſonable Beings, are yet poſſeſs'd of various Degrees of Reaſon. And tho' we are conſcious of our own perſonal Powers or Attainments, yet we are far from knowing how Matters really ſtand with other Men. Here is another Source of Difficulties. We cannot, in many Inſtances, determine What Men ought, or ought not

to do; or how far they are either to be commended, or cenſur'd. In many Points they muſt be left to an higher Judge; becauſe the true State of Matters is entirely beyond our Reach.

Once more; A conſiderable Part of Men's real Characters will ariſe either from their private Conduct, or from that which paſſes within their own Minds; and conſequently, it is impoſſible to ſay, in many Inſtances, who is really a Good, or a Bad Man. In ſuch Caſes as theſe we are concern'd to uſe the beſt Light we have, and to act accordingly. Yet, if we could ſee farther into Matters, we ſhould reaſonably proceed in a different Way: Different Meaſures would appear to be proper for us, ariſing from ſuch Reaſons, as in the preſent State are entirely conceal'd from us.

From conſidering the Nature and Imperfections of Men, our Author goes on, and mentions another Source of Duty, *viz.* The Relation we ſtand in to God and our Fellow-Creatures.

The Firſt and Original Relation in which we ſtand to God, is that of a Creature to his Creator: But This will infer nothing, unleſs we conſider God likewiſe as exerciſing a Providence over us; —— as noting and obſerving our Actions; —— as preſcribing a Rule to them; and exacting an Obedience to it.

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This then is the firſt thing which ariſes from our Relation to God, That we pay an unfeign'd Obedience to his Will; but wherein this Will conſiſts, ſtill remains to be enquir'd. To this Purpoſe then it ſhould be conſider'd, that in order to prove a Providence, in the full Senſe of the Word, we are oblig'd to evince the ſeveral Perfections of the Divine Nature; at leaſt thoſe which relate to us; ſuch as are, Power, Knowledge, Wiſdom, Juſtice, Goodneſs, Truth. From theſe it will follow, That we ought to Love him, —— to Reverence him, —— to Truſt in him, —— to Worſhip him, and the like. So far as this, I hope, there will be no Diſpute.

But then we ſhould conſider likewiſe, that as God is known to be related to us as a Creator and Preſerver, ſo there may, (for any thing we can affirm to the contrary,) be ſeveral other Relations to us which He ſuſtains. He may be related to us as a Redeemer and a Sanctifier. I know theſe Points are entirely exploded by The Gentleman I am now concern'd with: But it is much eaſier to laugh at a Doctrine than to refute it. It ſhould be prov'd therefore that the Notions of a Redeemer and a Sanctifier are utterly abſurd and contradictious; otherwiſe theſe Doctrines may poſſibly be true. And if we have ſufficient external Evidence that they are ſo, we may claim a Right of aſſigning

ing ſome other Relations of God to us, than thoſe founded in Creation and Preſervation.

Let us ſuppoſe then, that Theſe Relations do ſubſiſt, and ſee what may be the Conſequences ariſing from them. If it be ſaid, that Duty will be ſtill the ſame, the Aſſertion may perhaps be true in a certain Senſe. No Duties may ariſe of a different Kind from thoſe deducible from Creation and Preſervation. Yet it will be apparent at firſt Sight, that here will be new Enforcements and Recommendations of Duty; and new Reaſons for the punctual Performance of them. If theſe therefore are undiſcoverable by mere natural Light, how can it be affirm'd, that we may have a perfect Knowledge of all the Relations in which we ſtand to God; and of all that is founded in the Nature and Reaſon of Things?

Next to the Relations in which we ſtand to God, we ſhould conſider Thoſe which ſubſiſt between us and our Fellow-Creatures. Here I am apt to think our Author hath conſider'd Matters very imperfectly: For, by *Fellow-Creatures* he ſeems to mean no more than Human Kind in general; —— none but thoſe of the ſame Rank and Order with ourſelves. This may appear pretty plainly from his Courſe of Reaſoning in the Second Chapter. Now, however the Relation in which we ſtand either to Mankind in general, or to ſingle Perſons in particular, ſhould be ſufficient

cient to direct us to the ſocial Duties in general, yet certainly theſe Duties will not take in every thing which hath a Foundation in the Nature and Reaſon of Things. There may be ſeveral other Matters fit and proper to be done, or avoided; and for which there may be very important Reaſons aſſignable, however remote from common Notice and Obſervation.

We ſhould conſider ourſelves not only as Individuals of a certain Species or Members of a Society, but likewiſe as Parts of a whole Syſtem; and as Beings capable of doing Things either ſerviceable or inconvenient to the Whole, or any particular Branches of it. But do we really know all the ſeveral Relations in which we ſtand to every ſenſible or intelligent Creature? Can we tell how far our Actions may affect them; and aſſign *all* the Reaſons which have a Foundation in the Nature of Things, either for, or againſt a particular Behaviour? Is it not poſſible therefore, that ſome Matters may appear, in our Views of Things, as ſlight and inconſiderable, which are yet of great Moment to the Good and Advantage of the Whole?

Let us only reflect how difficult it is for private Perſons, and thoſe who are unexperienc'd in the Greater Affairs of Life, to account for all the Meaſures of Conduct which a Wiſe and Able Politician may find it neceſſary to enter into. Theſe are all built on

the ſeveral Relations ſubſiſting either between different States, or the particular Parts of the ſame State. Were every thing of this kind clear and apparent, it would be more eaſy to judge concerning a right or wrong Adminiſtration. But if theſe Things are ſo difficult to be judg'd of; and the narrow Schemes of Human Policy are ſo far beyond the Reach of moſt Men, How ſhall we determine concerning the Whole Syſtem of Nature? How ſhall we judge concerning God's Proceedings, and the Adminiſtrations of Providence? And how ſhall we be certain, from our own weak Reaſon, what is in every reſpect fit and proper to be done by us?

To what hath been ſuggeſted by this Gentleman as neceſſary and ſufficient to diſcover all that is founded in the Reaſon of Things, I ſhall crave Leave to add One Thing farther, ſince he hath been pleas'd to overlook it: And I cannot but think it of conſiderable Moment, ſince the general Rules deducible from the foregoing Conſiderations, will be frequently unſerviceable without it. I mean, the Nature and Powers of all thoſe ſeveral Beings by which we are ſurrounded, and with which we have any manner of Concern. Here then a very large Field opens. It takes in a conſiderable Part of Nature: For without a deep Knowledge in theſe Things, we ſhall be incapable of diſcerning, on numberleſs Occaſions, What is really fit

to

to be done, either with reſpect to ourſelves or others.

Be theſe general Rules therefore, in reference to ourſelves, however perfectly known, *viz.* That we ought to do nothing which will Deſtroy Life, —— Prejudice Health, —— Impair the Reaſon, —— Heighten the Paſſions, and the like; yet ſtill, before they can ſerve us, we muſt know What particular kinds of Actions or Omiſſions will contribute to theſe ſeveral Ends: And, in order to This, we muſt know What are the Natures and Powers of thoſe ſeveral Beings with which we have any manner of Concern; becauſe, otherwiſe, by an undue Application of them, we may really produce the Evils we would avoid.

Thus again, with reſpect to our Neighbours; It may be known with Certainty enough, that we ought to perform to them all the Offices of Juſtice and Humanity; —— That we ought neither to do them any unneceſſary Prejudice, nor to decline any fair Opportunities of ſerving them. Theſe Things will ariſe from conſidering, that as we are Creatures of the ſame Kind, ſo we are equally the Subjects of the ſame Divine Care and Providence. Notwithſtanding this, many other Things muſt likewiſe be known in order to diſcover how it will be fit to act on every emergent Occaſion. We muſt know What will prejudice or ſerve our Neigh-

bour; and, for this Purpoſe, What Influence, whether good or bad, the Uſe and Application of natural Things, may, in certain Circumſtances, have on them.

It is true, indeed, Obſervation and Experience will teach us ſomewhat here, without much Inſight into natural Science: But then, it ſhould be noted at the ſame Time, that this will carry us no farther than the groſſer and more obvious Appearances. Things which operate with Diſpatch, and to a Degree immediately perceivable, can ſcarce eſcape our Notice. But, what if their Influences ſhould be remote, and the Working ſlow and gradual? In ſuch Caſes, Experience will do little Service: We ſhall know ſcarce any thing at all; and conſequently, be liable, on numberleſs Occaſions, to be deceiv'd into a Conduct, which upon fuller Information we might, and would have avoided.

The Reſult is This; Since Nothing can be properly to us a Law, which is by us undiſcoverable; Since there are many Things, even in thoſe Sources of Duty laid down by this Author, undiſcoverable by us; Since we are far from knowing all the Natures of Things,— all the ſeveral Relations they have to one another, and conſequently, all that is founded in, and muſt reſult from theſe Conſiderations, were Matters fully laid open to us; it follows, that The Law or Religion of Nature cannot include every thing

which

which is founded in the Nature and Reaſon of Things.

Before I proceed farther, it will be proper to ſupport the foregoing Reaſonings by ſolving an Objection which we meet with, *p.* 26. Our Author there argues for the Sufficiency of Human Reaſon to diſcover every thing which is fit and proper to be done; and the Argument is drawn from conſidering the End for which the Faculty of Reaſon was given us. "The End, ſaith he, for which God "hath given us Reaſon, is, to compare "Things, and the Relation they ſtand in to "each other; and from thence to judge of "the Fitneſs and Unfitneſs of Actions. And "could not our Reaſon judge ſoundly in "All ſuch Matters, it could not have an-"ſwer'd the End for which infinite Wiſ-"dom and Goodneſs beſtow'd that excellent "Gift."

All Arguments alledg'd to prove that a Thing really is, which in Fact is not, muſt be vain Preſumptions. And therefore, if it ſhall appear, from what hath been already obſerv'd, that Human Reaſon cannot diſcover all the Fitneſs of Things; what is now advanc'd by this Gentleman muſt be groundleſs and inconcluſive.

Were his Reaſoning of any Force, it would prove abundantly too much. It would equally prove, that Human Reaſon is commenſurate to all Truth; For Reaſon was

given us to diſcover Truth; And therefore, (to uſe his own Words) "If it could not "judge ſoundly in all ſuch Matters, it could "not anſwer the End for which God be-"ſtow'd it on us." To which may be added, that all Men, on this Foot of arguing, muſt neceſſarily have equal Degrees of Reaſon,—— or equal Capacities to diſcover all Truth. For, as all Men have Reaſon, ſo the End of beſtowing that Faculty on them muſt be the ſame in all: Every Man therefore muſt be capable of diſcovering all Truth; and conſequently, all Men muſt have equal intellectual Capacities: unleſs it may be affirm'd, that whilſt every Man is capable of diſcovering all Truth, ſome are capable of diſcovering more than all.

The real State of the Caſe ſeems to be This; Whatever thoſe good Purpoſes are for which the Reaſon we enjoy will ſerve, Theſe were the Ends for which God beſtow'd it on us: By knowing therefore how far our Reaſon, conſider'd as a Means, will carry us, we may know how extenſive the End itſelf muſt be: For we may be ſure that an all-wiſe Being cannot propoſe an End impoſſible to be obtain'd. If therefore our Reaſon cannot lead us into the Diſcovery of every Truth, nor of all the real Fitneſſes of Things, it is apparent, that all Matters of this kind were not deſign'd to be diſcover'd by our Reaſon. The Principle on which our Author builds,

builds, *viz.* "That Reaſon was given us "to diſcover the Fitneſs or Unfitneſs of "Actions," if it be underſtood in an univerſal Senſe, is wrong; —— if in a limited one, his Concluſion fails: And his great Error lies in This, that his Inference is more extenſive than his Premiſes. The one being true only in a limited Senſe, the other cannot be true in an univerſal one.

But beſides that the Notion of the Law or Religion of Nature, which this Gentleman purſues, is entirely wrong, as apply'd by him in the preſent Debate, we may obſerve farther, that it will by no means come up to his Purpoſe, nor ſupport the Concluſions he deduces from it.

His general Purpoſe, is to ſhew, That a Revelation is perfectly needleſs and ſuperfluous; and his Method of proving it is This; That the Religion of Nature is every way ſufficient, and abſolutely perfect. But how does This appear? —— We ſhall ſee immediately: This Religion, ſays he, contains under it every Thing which is founded in the Nature and Reaſons of Things: It muſt therefore be abſolutely perfect, and incapable either of receiving Addition, or admitting Diminution. Well: all this might be ſuppos'd, and yet this all-perfect Religion be of little Service to us. For, what if the Circumſtances of Mankind ſhould be ſuch, as to diſable them from diſcovering what this Reli-

gion of Nature is! Of This our Gentleman was aware; and he endeavours to obviate it by obſerving, That this Religion of Nature was originally given by God to every Man; — That every Man muſt therefore be enabled to know it perfectly; and of Conſequence, Nothing remains to be done by Revelation which was not as effectually ſecured without it.

I ſhall ſay nothing here concerning the abſolute Perfection and Immutability of this Law of Nature. Theſe are Heads which ſhall be diſtinctly conſider'd hereafter. At preſent I ſhall obſerve, upon Suppoſition that theſe extraordinary Aſſertions were true, (which yet I am ſo far from admitting, that I ſhall endeavour to diſprove them in another Place); — I ſay, upon this very Suppoſition, it will by no Means follow that a Revelation is uſeleſs and ſuperfluous.

I ſhall aſſign Two Reaſons for this Purpoſe;

1. Becauſe, by laying before Men in One View a regular Syſtem of Religious Truths and Precepts, it muſt very much aſſiſt Men in Enquiries of this Nature, and make ſuch Diſcoveries abundantly more eaſy to them.

2. Becauſe, the Authority by which ſuch a Revelation is made, will engage their Attention; and more effectually impreſs upon their Minds a Senſe of theſe Things, than the

the mere Workings of their own Thoughts about them could poſſibly do.

I do here ſuppoſe the utmoſt which our Author himſelf contends for, *viz.* That Men are furniſh'd with natural Powers ſufficient for the Diſcovery of every Thing which is founded in the Nature and Reaſon of Things: Yet ſtill Experience ſhews us, that Men do not actually, and in Fact, know every thing which might poſſibly have been diſcover'd by them. There is a great deal of Difference between the mere Power of Reaſoning, and the Exerciſe of this Power: And even when it is exerciſed in ſome meaſure, the Succeſs of Men's Enquiries will be different in proportion to the Ways and Methods in which they make them. From hence ariſes the Neceſſity of Teaching and Inſtruction; —— the Expediency and Uſefulneſs, I mean: For however ſtrong Men's natural Parts may be, they muſt be rightly directed in order to attain their End. Otherwiſe, by making a wrong Choice of Principles from which to argue, they may be led off from their Point; and the Matter intended to receive a Deciſion be left as much in the Dark as ever.

Let us therefore conſider a Divine Revelation none otherwiſe than as a noble Means of Inſtruction. Even in This View its Uſefulneſs will appear to Advantage. For, by propoſing a juſt Scheme both of Doctrines and Precepts, Men's Enquiries will be pointed

right;

right: They will ſee and know how to direct their Aims: And conſequently, muſt attain their End with much more Eaſe, than if they had been left to their own unaſſiſted Reaſon.

All this will be confeſs'd in reference to other Matters. A Skill in other Arts and Sciences is obtain'd with much more Readineſs by conſulting judicious Syſtems already fram'd, than by labouring to make the full Diſcovery ourſelves. I do not here take Notice, that many Perſons are capable of apprehending a Thing already invented, who are utterly incapable of making the Diſcovery by their own Force of Thought: (For theſe two Things require very different Talents): This, I ſay, ſhall be left out of the Queſtion here. Be Men furniſh'd with Abilities as well to invent for themſelves, as to apprehend what is offer'd by others: Notwithſtanding this, Invention itſelf may be forwarded and aſſiſted; and the Knowledge of Truth be attained with much greater Facility and Diſpatch when regularly pointed out to them, than if they had never heard, or thought of it before.

And indeed, on any other Foot than this, thoſe worthy Perſons, who have labour'd in the Purſuit of Knowledge, have labour'd only for themſelves. If their Diſcoveries have been of no Uſe to others, they might as well have kept them ſecret; and have left the

the reſt of the World to trace out ſuch Matters in their own Way. But if this be really the Caſe with regard to other Arts, why may not like Advantages ariſe in the Diſcovery of Religion, from ſetting before Men a juſt and proper Scheme of it? And if this be once allow'd, then a Revelation for this Purpoſe neither is, nor can be uſeleſs.

If it be ſaid here, that every thing this way may be as well perform'd by the Labours of Men, who are concern'd to teach and inſtruct their Fellow-Creatures; and that mere Inſtruction, whether it come from God or Man, will amount to much the ſame, and produce the ſame Effects; —— If this, I ſay, be alledg'd, we muſt obſerve a vaſt Difference between them. Divine Inſtruction, if known to be ſuch, will carry with it much greater Authority, and claim Attention in a higher Degree than any Inſtitution merely human can pretend to. Thoſe who believe it will think themſelves concern'd to receive it with Reverence, and to ſtudy it with Diligence. The neceſſary and eſſential Dependance of The Creature on The Creator will enforce this on them. But can the like be pleaded in Behalf of any mere human Inſtruction, how wiſe and excellent ſoever it may be in itſelf! Are not Men, in ſuch Caſes, apt to reflect, That no one Man, merely as ſuch, hath any Authority to dictate or preſcribe to others? —— That they have therefore a Liberty to ſtudy

ſtudy or neglect his Inſtructions, as they pleaſe? In conſequence of which, they will be apt to remit their Labours, and to give off, upon the firſt Diſcouragement of Difficulty in the Enquiry. This, ſurely, is no ſmall Advantage, that the Things propos'd will recommend themſelves to our Conſideration in proportion to the Weight and Authority of the Propoſer.

Over and above this it may be added farther, That the Religious Knowledge gain'd this way, will be embrac'd more ſteadily; and the Senſe of theſe Things will become more vigorous and lively. Whatever Advantages can ariſe from mere rational Deduction, are all equally enjoy'd by That Perſon, who is inſtructed by Revelation. He is ſuppos'd, in the preſent Caſe, equally to diſcern the Fitneſs and Reaſon of Things, as being directed to them by the Revelation itſelf. However, it is remarkable, that habitual Knowledge is not always the Rule of our Actions. If it be enquir'd from whence this ariſes, we ſhall eaſily ſee, that good Rules, and ſuch as we acknowledge to be ſo, are apt to be forgotten; — That our Paſſions blind us, and Temptations lead us aſtray; and we are by theſe Means ſeduc'd into a Behaviour, which in our more ſerious and thinking Hours we muſt condemn. To aid this Infirmity, it becomes expedient, that the proper Rules of Conduct ſhould come recommended to us,

and

and enforc'd upon us by ſomething more than the mere Reaſons of Things themſelves;—— by ſomething which ſhall fix and imprint them deep upon our Minds; and make them recur to us as often as fit Occaſions and Opportunities require. This is moſt effectually done by having them deliver'd and confirm'd to us as the expreſs Will of God; by having them propos'd, not merely as the prudent Advices of Wiſe Men, but the firm Decrees of The Almighty. This, if any thing, will fix our Attention: And where this fails, all other Methods will be vain.

I might carry on this Point much farther, and ſupport it by many other Reflections; from whence The Expediency of a Revelation may appear, as well to make the Knowledge of a moral Rule more eaſy, more perfect and more general, as to enforce it more ſtrongly on the Conſciences and Lives of Men. But I retreat at preſent, ſince theſe are Matters which belong more properly to another Part of my Deſign. Thus much however is not amiſs to have been hinted here; that whilſt I have been endeavouring to prove this Author's Notion of the Religion of Nature, as applied by him, to be wrong, it may appear at the ſame Time that 'tis uſeleſs and unſerviceable to thoſe Purpoſes for which He advances it.

Hitherto I have conſider'd the Law or Religion of Nature, as it is us'd to ſignify a per-

perfect Collection of all thoſe Doctrines and Precepts, which have a real Foundation in the Truth and Reaſon of Things; and have endeavour'd to ſhew, that, taken in this Senſe, it cannot, properly ſpeaking, be to us a Law or Religion. I ſhall now conſider it in another View, *viz.* as it implies ſuch a Collection only, as may be diſcover'd by us in the Uſe of our proper Faculties; ſuch a one, as we are able to make out in the Uſe of thoſe Means and Opportunities we enjoy. In this Senſe only it can be properly to us a Law; becauſe, in this Senſe only it can oblige: For, it is impoſſible we ſhould be oblig'd to any thing we are incapable of knowing.

For the more diſtinct Explication of this Notion, the general Truth of which is clear and certain enough, it ſhould be obſerved, that as the Law of Nature is ſuch a Collection, *&c.* as we are capable of making in the due Uſe and Exerciſe of Reaſon, ſo the State and Condition of human Reaſon ought to be thoroughly conſider'd by us.

A Diſtinction therefore ſhould be made between Reaſon as it ſubſiſted in its moſt perfect State, whilſt Man lived in a State of Innocence, and as it now ſubſiſts in the preſent corrupt Condition of human Nature. For, no Concluſions can be made from the Powers of Reaſon in the one Caſe, to the like Powers of it in the other.

This,

This, I think, is certain. But yet I ſhall not inſiſt on it at preſent; becauſe our Author denies all Ground and Foundation for this Diſtinction; and maintains, that human Nature is ſtill in the very ſame Condition, in which it was at firſt created. [*Vid.* p. 375.] I ſhall therefore conſider human Reaſon as it now really and in Fact ſubſiſts.

In the next place, we ſhould diſtinguiſh between human Reaſon as it is diſpers'd thro' all human Kind, and as it ſubſiſts ſeparately in particular Perſons. If it be conſider'd in the former Senſe, Nothing is above human Reaſon, which is capable of being diſcover'd by the particular Reaſon of any particular Man, or the joint Reaſon of all Men. In this View human Reaſon may maſter every thing, which either hath been, or may be maſter'd by Man; which either hath been diſcover'd by the former Learned, or may be diſcover'd by the future Learned.

To ſee the better how far this concerns our preſent Purpoſe, we muſt obſerve, that no One Man, even of the ſtrongeſt Parts, and under the moſt advantageous Circumſtances, ever yet exhauſted any Art or Science. Its ſeveral Branches have been variouſly improv'd by different Men; and ſucceſſive Writers have added ſomething to the Stock already gather'd in by thoſe who have gone before them. What is obſervable in other Arts is eſpecially to be remark'd in Matters of Morality.

Morality. This likewiſe hath gradually improv'd; but with This Difference however, that ſometimes thoſe who have improv'd, in certain Particulars, on the preceding Scheme, have yet corrupted it in others: And however valuable a Collection may poſſibly be made from the Writings of ſeveral Authors, yet no compleat and unexceptionable Syſtem hath been offer'd the World by any One of them.

We may complain therefore with great Juſtice of our Adverſaries on this Head. They argue from what human Reaſon can do, conſider'd as 'tis diſpers'd thro' all human Kind; and conclude for a like Power, as it ſubſiſts in particular Men: —— Juſt as reaſonably as it would be to inſiſt, that whatever Effects can be produc'd by the joint Force of all Men, the ſame may be produc'd by the ſingle Power of any.

Upon Suppoſition therefore that a perfect Scheme of Moral Rules might be gather'd from the Writings of the ſeveral Philoſophers; and conſequently, was not abſolutely undiſcoverable by mere human Reaſon, (which yet can never be prov'd) ſtill, before this can be of Service to the Gentleman I am now debating with, he muſt prove theſe Two Points;

1. That whatſoever was diſcoverable by Mankind gradually, and in a long Courſe of Years, was equally diſcoverable at once.

For,

For, if it were not diſcoverable at once, then a Time may be aſſign'd when certain Moral Points were not at all diſcoverable; and conſequently, that human Reaſon hath not, at all Times, been able to maſter every Moral Truth and Precept.

He muſt prove likewiſe,

2*dly*, That whatſoever is diſcoverable by *all* collectively taken, is diſcoverable by every one ſeparately conſider'd; or, at leaſt, that whatſoever is once diſcover'd by ſome, is comprehenſible by all. But both theſe Points are falſe in Fact; and ſo obviouſly falſe, that no thinking Perſon can miſtake about them. There is not only an Incapacity in ſingle Perſons to diſcover what may eaſily be found out by the united Labours of all; but there is likewiſe a vaſt Difference between Men in point of Natural Parts and Abilities. And where theſe are really alike, there is yet a great Difference as to the Opportunities of uſing them. Upon theſe Accounts it is ſeen every Day, That however deſirous of Knowledge and Improvement different Men may be, yet they are incapable of the ſame Attainments; ſome ever exceeding others in proportion to the Degrees of their natural Talents, and the Occaſions they have of uſing them.

To go on; Human Reaſon, as it ſubſiſts ſeparately in every particular Perſon, may

likewiſe be conſider'd, Either as it is enjoy'd by Men under the moſt advantageous Circumſtances; or elſe, as it is poſſeſs'd under the worſt; or, Laſtly, as it is ordinarily ſeen in the Bulk and Generality of Mankind.

The Lord Biſhop of *London* hath diſtinctly conſider'd it in the Two former Views; and ſhewn, with Great Accuracy, what have been the ſeveral Concluſions, as well of the Wiſeſt and moſt Learned, as of the Weakeſt and moſt Ignorant. His Lordſhip hath prov'd, to the great Advantage of our Cauſe, that even The Philoſophers, who carry'd Matters of a Religious or Moral Nature to a great Heighth, have yet in ſeveral Particulars been *ignorant*, *uncertain*, or *miſtaken*. They muſt therefore be unfit to be the abſolute Directors of other Men, ſince they were ſo liable to err themſelves.

But if the very wiſeſt have err'd here, we ſhall be leſs ſurpris'd at the Groſſneſs of the rude and barbarous. Theſe being Strangers to all the Improvements of Education and Art, can go but a little way in the Diſcovery of Truth;——are incapable of directing or controuling their Paſſions in any tolerable Degree. And Experience itſelf ſhews, that as their Ignorance is extreme, ſo their Opinions and Practices in religious Matters are monſtrous.

Here

Here we ſhall be told, That the State and Condition of human Reaſon ought not to be judg'd of from the Capacities of the Meaneſt Perſons, and theſe likewiſe labouring under the greateſt Diſadvantages. True: And therefore, as we muſt not judge concerning the Reaſon of Philoſophers by the Reaſon of Barbarians, ſo neither muſt we meaſure the Reaſon of Barbarians by that of Philoſophers. This is the very thing which I complain of in our Adverſaries. They are apt to infer from the noble Diſcoveries which have been made by the deepeſt Thinkers, that the ſame may be made by every One elſe, who will give himſelf the Pains of making them. Whereas the real Truth is, a great Number of Men are not only incapable of making theſe Diſcoveries themſelves, but of apprehending the Reaſons on which they are built when diſcover'd by others, and fairly laid before them. Nothing therefore can be more extravagant than to argue from the Capacities of the One, to the like or equal Abilities in the other.

After all, in order to judge concerning the general Compaſs of human Reaſon, I ſhall conſider it neither in its beſt, nor yet in its worſt View: I ſhall take it as it ſubſiſts in the Bulk and Generality of Mankind; and ſee how far it may and will carry Men.

Here then it ſhould be conſider'd, that the greateſt Part of the World have always

been, and ever will be oblig'd to act a Part in low Life: in which, (tho' we ſhould ſuppoſe the natural Capacities of Mankind to be originally equal,) they cannot receive the Advantage of a proper Education in the Beginning; Nor have they Time to purſue Matters of Reaſoning very far, how deſirous ſoever they may be of doing it. In things which fall under common Obſervation, (ſuch as are the ordinary Arts of Life,) they may ſhew Sagacity enough. Yet, even here we ſhall find, for the moſt Part, that their Skill is reſtrain'd to thoſe Matters which lie within their proper Buſineſs. Different Men excel in different Ways; But in Matters out of the common Road of Thinking they ſeem as much at a Loſs, as tho' they were entirely without any Power of Reaſoning at all about them.

What hath been obſerv'd concerning the ſeveral Arts of Life, towards which Men have not been us'd to direct their Thoughts, will appear more evidently in Matters which depend on abſtract Reaſoning. Philoſophy is not born with a Man, but learnt by much Pains and Application. To make a Figure this way he muſt devote himſelf almoſt entirely to it;——muſt view things in every Point of Light; and determine upon a long Compariſon of one Thing with another.

Yet, Morality, it ſeems, may preſently be diſcover'd. Every thing in all Circumſtances fit

fit to be done, may be ſeen with Eaſe: And no Man can need Inſtruction, ſince the Means of Knowledge are entirely within himſelf. Were This the Caſe, (as the Gentleman I am now concern'd with contends,) one might expect that the nobleſt Remains of The antient Philoſophers might be equall'd by every Day-Labourer. But doth Fact anſwer theſe Expectations? Do we find that the Generality of Men are ſuch notable Reaſoners in Moral Matters;——or, that every thing lies ſo clear before them? The Thing is in its own Nature impoſſible. As they are not train'd up to Enquiries of this Nature, ſo neither have they Leiſure nor Opportunities for purſuing them: And we might as well expect that, in ſuch Circumſtances as theſe, they ſhould gain an exact Skill in Natural Philoſophy as Moral.

Upon the whole; Men, conſider'd in theſe different Views, have different Capacities and Opportunities of Knowledge; in proportion to which their ſeveral Schemes of Moral Conduct muſt be various. And as That only is to them a Law, which is by them diſcoverable, it follows, that this Law itſelf, as it regards different Men, muſt be various; —— by no means One and the Same to all; but of a greater or leſs Extent, as they are capable of making greater or leſs Diſcoveries in Moral Science. In ſhort, it is Such a Collection of Moral Rules, as each

Perſon, according to the Circumſtances he is plac'd in, is capable of making for himſelf.

Thus far I have endeavour'd to State the Law or Religion of Nature, and to ſhew What ought to be underſtood by the Term. I am concern'd, in the next place, to enquire, From whence the Obligation to obſerve this Law ariſes. And to this I am led, not only becauſe The Gentleman, whoſe Performance is now before me, ſpeaks variouſly on the Point, and aſſigns different Grounds, as he hath different Purpoſes to ſerve by it; but likewiſe, becauſe ſome other Matters to be inſiſted on hereafter, may be influenc'd by a right Determination here.

It muſt be own'd that our Author for the moſt part ſpeaks of The Law or Religion of Nature as *The Will of God*; —— as *God's Will internally reveal'd*; —— as *a Law given us by God*. And one Argument whereby he would prove it to be an abſolutely perfect Law, is This; "Becauſe it comes from a "Being of abſolute Wiſdom and Perfection." According to theſe Paſſages Obligation muſt be deriv'd from the Divine Will; —— The Will of That Being who is repreſented as The Cauſe and Author of this Law.

Yet, in other Places he ſtates the Point otherwiſe; and derives Obligation from the Nature and Reaſon of Things themſelves. Thus he tells us, "The eternal Reaſon of "Things

" Things is the ſupreme Obligation. " [p. 367.] And, in another place, he ſpeaks of " Man's being good by the Original Ob- " ligation of the Moral Fitneſs of Things, " in Conformity to the Nature, and in Imi- " tation of the perfect Will of God. " p. 368. He does not ſay, in *Obedience* to the perfect Will of God, but in *Imitation* of it. This Paſſage ſeems to intimate that God himſelf is properly oblig'd by the Moral Fitneſs of Things; and, that whilſt we are good by this Original Obligation, we imitate God, who is likewiſe govern'd by the ſame Original Obligation.

I know ſeveral Worthy and Good Men have often expreſs'd themſelves in ſuch a manner, as tho' they imagin'd Obligation did ariſe from the abſtract Natures and Fitneſſes of Things. They have ſpoken of Obligation as antecedent to the Will of God, at leaſt in order of Conception; and ſometimes of God himſelf as the Subject of Obligation. Theſe ſeem to be inaccurate Expreſſions: And I hope I ſhall be pardon'd, if I repreſent the Reaſons of my Diſagreement with them on this Head.

It is allow'd readily, that as there are ſeveral Relations ſubſiſting between Men and other Beings, ſo thoſe Kinds of acting which are truly expreſſive of theſe Relations may be ſaid, in ſome Senſe, to be fit, proper, and reaſonable. And as there are certain

Ends ſuitable to our Nature, ſo thoſe Actions which are proper to obtain theſe Ends, may on that account be ſaid to have a Fitneſs in them. By Fitneſs therefore I do underſtand, Either the Relation of a Sign to the thing ſignified by that Sign; —— or, of a Means to the End obtainable by that Means.

It may be allow'd farther, That ſuch Fitneſſes as theſe are, at leaſt in order of Conception, antecedent to the Will of God; I mean the Will of God, as it relates to the Conduct and Behaviour of his Creatures. For, if God requires a certain Conduct becauſe it is fit, it is evident, that a Fitneſs it had antecedent to the Command, and on which the Command itſelf is built: Otherwiſe, God would not command it, becauſe it is fit, but it muſt Therefore alone be fit, becauſe God commands it. This, I muſt confeſs, is attended with Difficulties I know not how to maſter.

Yet ſtill I do by no means maintain, that theſe Fitneſſes are abſolutely before all Will of God, and entirely independent on it. Here then we muſt diſtinguiſh between the Will of God, as it regards the Order and Conſtitution of Things, and the ſame Will, as it regards the Actions and Conduct of his Creatures. The Fitneſs of Things muſt be ſubſequent to the Will of God, if we underſtand his Will in the former Senſe of the Expreſſion; For Things are therefore fit, becauſe God

God hath conſtituted Nature in ſuch a manner as to make them ſo: But then it muſt precede God's Will, when underſtood in the latter Senſe; ſince God therefore wills Things, becauſe they are fit and proper.

But however this be, yet I cannot ſee how Obligation, ſtrictly ſo call'd, ariſes from the mere Fitneſs of Things, whether we underſtand by it the Suitableneſs of certain Actions to the ſeveral Relations in which we ſtand, as being truly expreſſive of them; or elſe, their being conducive as Means to thoſe good Ends they are naturally capable of producing.

If we underſtand Fitneſs in the former Senſe, it falls in with Mr. *Woollaſton*'s Notion of *Truth*; and therefore we muſt enquire what Obligations Men are under, to Truth, merely as ſuch, whether it be expreſs'd by Words or Actions.

It is reaſonable, you will ſay, for a reaſonable Being to conform to Truth, and abſurd to do the contrary. Well: But then another Queſtion ariſes, *viz.* What Obligation is a reaſonable Being under to ſpeak or act thus reaſonably, ſuppoſing that a Conformity to Truth is in all Caſes reaſonable? There can be no Obligation, where there is no kind of Motive to act or to forbear. Mere Reaſon may indeed direct and ſhew the Way; but ſomething elſe is neceſſary in order to induce and influence us.

To

To this poſſibly it will be reply'd, that a reaſonable Being, whilſt he attends to Reaſon, cannot but take a Pleaſure in acting according to it, and feel a Pain in deviating from it; and conſequently, that the Obligation to act agreeably to theſe Fitneſſes of Things, ariſes from the Pleaſure and Satisfaction which attends this Courſe, and the Uneaſineſs and Diſſatisfaction which follows the contrary. Be this then the real State of the Caſe: It will appear from hence, that Fitneſs, even in the former Senſe of the Word, can infer Obligation no farther than it ſerves as a Means to ſome farther End; and this leads me on to conſider what Obligation ariſes from Fitneſs in the latter Senſe.

The End which we propoſe to ourſelves, whatever it be, muſt regard Either the Syſtem in general, or ſome particular Beings in this Syſtem, or Ourſelves.

Be the End therefore ſome Good or other relating to the Syſtem in general, or ſome particular Beings in the Syſtem; Then this Queſtion will ariſe, How are we obliged to purſue this Good, or What Motive can we have to do ſo? If it be ſaid, that the Goodneſs of the Thing is itſelf a ſufficient Motive, a ſufficient Inducement, a ſufficient Obligation, —— we may ask, —— To whom is the Thing propos'd Good? If to others only, it remains to be ſhewn, How the Good of others can at all affect us, unleſs we ourſelves have ſome

ſome Intereſt or other in their Good: If to the Man, who is concern'd to act, then he purſues it under the Notion of a private and perſonal Good. He purſues it, Either becauſe his own Intereſts are ſome way or other dependent on ſuch a Courſe; or at leaſt, becauſe he takes a Pleaſure in conſidering the Good which he does to others. On either Suppoſition, Obligation muſt at laſt be founded in a Deſire of his own particular Happineſs: And the Fitneſs of Things, ſo far as it is capable of having any Influence over him, muſt imply a Suitableneſs of Things to the promoting, ſome way or other, his own Happineſs.

I have now driven the Point ſo far as This; There can be no Motive, no Obligation at all to act or to forbear, where our own Good is entirely out of Queſtion. The next Point to be enquir'd into, is This; Whether the mere Satisfaction which may ariſe from a certain Action, with its Contrary; or elſe, the mere natural Conduciveneſs of that Action to a certain Good, with its Contrary, be a ſufficient Ground on which to build Moral Obligation: And if the Negative ſhall appear, we muſt go ſomewhat farther in order to diſcover where to place Obligation, and what it is.

Now there are ſome Objections, to me inſuperable, againſt building it on Either of theſe Foundations. If you found it in the mere Satisfaction which ariſes to the Mind from

from a certain Action, *&c.* with its Contrary; then Obligation can reach no farther than the Action propos'd is really fitted to produce this Effect. Be it, for inſtance, an Act of Humanity or Good Nature: On this Suppoſition a Man is no farther obliged to it, than he is actually poſſeſs'd of tender Sentiments towards his Kind. Should he happen to be void of This Taſte, This inward Spirit of Benevolence; and find no Pleaſure in the Thought of doing good to others, he muſt be perfectly free, and under no Obligation to do the leaſt Inſtance of Kindneſs to his Brethren.

Nay, ſhould it be ſuppos'd that, by any means whatſoever, he hath contracted a malicious Diſpoſition, and takes any kind of Satisfaction in the Misfortunes or Miſeries of others, it will follow from this Principle, that he is oblig'd to do them all the Miſchief he may have it in his Power to do. Hence may appear what a Scheme of Virtue can be erected on this Foundation.

Should this Hypotheſis be quitted; and ſhould it be affirm'd, That the mere Tendency of an Action to the preſent natural Good of the Agent, and ſo *vice verſâ*, is the proper Ground on which to build Moral Obligation; —— Then it muſt follow, that no Man is oblig'd to do, or omit any Action farther than it hath a real Tendency to promote or hinder his own preſent natural Good.

No

No Man can be oblig'd to do any Service to another, unleſs by doing it he promotes his own preſent Advantage, or lays a Foundation for ſome future greater Expectations. What muſt, in this Caſe, become of Friendſhip, Love of Country, Humanity, and the like?

It muſt follow, in the next place, upon the preſent Suppoſition, that if a temporal Advantage may be made to a Man's ſelf by Injuſtice, Unfaithfulneſs, betraying his Country, or bringing Miſery on Mankind, —— he is not merely at Liberty to do all theſe; but ſtrictly and properly oblig'd to it. His own preſent temporal Good, it ſeems, requires it; which being, in this way of ſtating it, the Ground of Obligation, it muſt likewiſe be the Meaſure of it.

I ſhall go on to add, That as the Notion of the Religion of Nature, conſider'd as a Religion, muſt refer us to God, The Author and Object of it, —— ſo the Notion of The Law of Nature, conſider'd as a Law, muſt refer us to ſome Superior, The Author of this Law; and from whoſe Will, directed by Wiſdom and Goodneſs, and ſupported by Power, all Obligation, ſtrictly and properly ſo call'd, muſt be at laſt deriv'd.

The Notion of Law in general conſiſts in This, That it is the Decree or Command of a Superior. If this be admitted, then The Law of Nature can be no otherwiſe a Law, than as we conceive it to be the Will and Com-

Command of That Being to whom we are naturally ſubject; and who is able and willing both to reward our Obedience, and to puniſh our Obſtinacy. On any other Foot than This, we ſhall run ourſelves on ſome of the Difficulties mention'd before, *viz.* Either, There may be a Law, where there is no Obligation; —— Or, There may be Obligation where there is no Motive or Inducement; —— Or elſe, Laſtly, Men are oblig'd by The Law of Nature to all thoſe Things for which they have ſome Motive, be the Matter in itſelf however pernicious to the Good or Safety of others. Were this once admitted, Virtue might be Vice, and Vice Virtue: The Law of Nature would be the moſt inconſiſtent thing imaginable: And the very ſame Perſons, upon a little Change of Circumſtances, oblig'd to be either Juſt or Unjuſt, Merciful or Cruel.

But the real State of the Caſe is This; There is an All-perfect Being exiſting, The Author of the Univerſe; who in like manner exerciſes a Providence over that World he firſt created. Becauſe He is All-perfect, He muſt be abſolutely Juſt and Good; and conſequently, muſt will the Happineſs of his Creatures. As He wills their Happineſs, He muſt will the proper Means of it; and therefore, that Men ſhould not only purſue their own real Good by ſuitable Means, but likewiſe the Good and Happineſs of their Brethren. For, ſince all Men have the ſame Rela-

Relation to God as Creatures, they muſt therefore be all of them the Objects of his Care. Should it therefore happen in ſome Caſes, that acting according to his Will, might be inconſiſtent with a preſent Intereſt, yet ſtill Obedience is abundantly ſecur'd: Becauſe, The ſame Being who preſcribes to us, will reward our Obedience, or puniſh our Diſobedience.

The Law of Nature then is, to us, a Law, becauſe it is, and muſt be The Will of God, on whom we are abſolutely dependent: And our Obligation to conform ourſelves to it, is founded on ſome Proſpect we have of a ſuitable Reward or Puniſhment.

In the Uſe of Reaſon Men are capable of diſcovering, in ſome Sort, the Matter of this Law; and the Enforcements by which it properly becomes a Law to us. So far as theſe are by us diſcoverable, ſo far this Law extends, and no farther: So far are Men ſtrictly oblig'd; For it is impoſſible that the Law ſhould itſelf ſubſiſt where Obligation ceaſes.

Upon the Whole; Moral Obligation ſignifies the Neceſſity we are under, to do or forbear ſome Action in Obedience to the Command of a Superior, who hath a Right to preſcribe to us, with a Power of enforcing his Commands; and from whom, in conſequence of this, we muſt either hope for ſome Reward or fear ſome Puniſhment: And the Obligation to the Law of Nature ſignifies, the Neceſſity

Neceſſity we are under of conforming our-ſelves to thoſe Precepts, which our Reaſon ſhews us to be the Will of God; by which Rule God will acquit or condemn, reward or puniſh us. Unleſs we conſider it in this View, it is to us no Law at all; and carries with it, ſtrictly ſpeaking, no Obligation: But as ſoon as we regard it in this Light, it becomes not only a Law but a Religion.

After all, I muſt confeſs that this laſt Point I have been conſidering, is a tender one; and am ſenſible that I have differ'd from ſome very worthy Men, whoſe Affection to the common Cauſe of Religion muſt not be queſtion'd. This may create ſome Prejudices; which will be heighten'd farther by Apprehenſions, that the Cauſe of Natural Religion muſt ſuffer by the preſent Way of treating it. Were This in Truth the Caſe, I ſhould not only decline this Method, but abhor it; for, certain it is, that Revelation itſelf cannot ſubſiſt, if Natural Religion be deſtroy'd; which, as it aids and ſtrengthens, it muſt in like manner preſuppoſe. But let me deſire to know Whence theſe Fears? Is not Natural Religion affected by this Point in the very ſame manner as Reveal'd? Is not God equally the Author of both? And is not our Obligation to both reſolveable into the ſame common Principle, *viz.* That they are the Will of that Being on whom we muſt depend abſolutely?

The

The Gentlemen with whom I am now debating, will allow me, that *Religion* muſt neceſſarily refer us to God: But then, they will diſtinguiſh between Religion and Morality. They will tell us, that as Morality hath a Foundation in the Nature and Reaſons of Things, ſo it derives its Obligation from the very ſame Principle: And as Fitneſs is antecedent, in order of Conception, to the Divine Will, Obligation to conform ourſelves to this Fitneſs muſt be ſo likewiſe. In a Word, as Reaſon, abſtracting from any Concern of the Divine Being about our Actions, may point out what is fit and proper, ſo the ſame Reaſon may effectually oblige us to it.

I am by no means fond of differing from any one merely for the Sake of differing: Much leſs willing ſhould I be, to have unneceſſary Debates with Perſons concern'd on the ſame Side of the general Queſtion. And therefore, in order to make my Sentiments on this Head more clear, I ſhall ſum up in a Series of Propoſitions, what I take to be the real State of the Caſe.

Prop. 1. There is a real and eſſential Difference between Things; on account of which ſome Things are fit and proper to be done, others to be omitted.

2. There is in every Man, who hath the uſe of thoſe Faculties which are proper to his Nature, a Power whereby he diſcerns, in ſome

Sort, the Difference between certain Actions; in conſequence of which he likes and approves ſome, he diſlikes and condemns others. Unleſs this be admitted, all Foundation of Natural Morality muſt fail; and there will be little Diſtinction, as to moral Matters, between Men and Brutes.

3. This moral Diſcernment is in different Men different: In ſome more nice and extenſive; in others leſs ſo. From whence it follows, that a moral Rule, founded only on this moral Diſcernment, muſt vary as much as the Diſcernment itſelf varies.

4. As all other Faculties are capable of Improvement or Decay, ſo we may aſſert the ſame of this likewiſe: And tho' I dare not ſay it is ever totally extinct whilſt any Degrees of Underſtanding remain, yet this muſt be allow'd, that it may in a great meaſure be impair'd.

5. Such Actions, as, in conſequence of this moral Diſcernment, are approv'd or condemn'd, muſt likewiſe produce a Liking or Eſteem of the Agent on the one hand, or a Diſlike or Diſeſteem of him on the other; and this ſeparate from any Conſideration of Advantage or Diſadvantage ariſing to Us. On this Foot we are delighted with a Good and Virtuous Character, or abhor its oppoſite; and this, when by Diſtance either of Time or Place, it is impoſſible that our own Intereſt ſhould be at all affected.

6. Thoſe

6. Thoſe Actions which a Man likes and approves in others, he muſt much more do ſo in himſelf, and ſo *vice verſâ*. From whence it follows, that as he eſteems and honours others on this account, or diſeſteems and condemns them; ſo, for the ſame Reaſon, he muſt be pleas'd and ſatisfied with himſelf whilſt he acts what he judges right, or concern'd and anxious whilſt he does what he reckons wrong. This I take to be a true account of Natural Conſcience.

7. It will follow from hence, that this Approbation of what is right, and Diſapprobation of its contrary, together with its conſequent Satisfaction or Uneaſineſs, is a natural Motive to purſue the one, and to avoid the other; and if all Hindrances were remov'd, would be ſufficient of itſelf to influence him.

8. But then, as the moral Diſcernment itſelf is different in different Perſons, on which account they vary much as to their natural Knowledge in moral Matters; ſo likewiſe their moral Taſte is found to vary greatly. From whence it comes to paſs, that different Men are poſſeſs'd of greater or leſs Degrees of Affection for what is right, —— with greater or leſs Degrees of Averſion from what is wrong.

9. The natural Motive therefore, mention'd under the Seventh Article, will have a different Influence over different Men; and whilſt

it may poſſibly be ſufficient for ſome, it may be far from being ſo for others.

10. For, however it may be ſuppos'd, that Men would be influenc'd by this Motive in its loweſt Degree, were there no Principles ſubſiſting by which it is counter-acted, yet we find in Fact that Men have a great Variety of Paſſions and Affections. Theſe frequently draw a contrary way; and diſappoint the good Effects which might otherwiſe ariſe from our moral Diſcernment and Taſte. To which may be added, That ſome preſent Advantage is frequently loſt, or ſome preſent Diſadvantage incurr'd by continuing firm to the Rules of Righteouſneſs. It may be thought, that in ſuch Caſes as theſe, Men are concern'd to have ſome Regard for themſelves. And therefore, unleſs the Pleaſure of purſuing what is ſuppos'd right ſhall overballance the Inconveniences attending it, there can be no ſufficient Motive, on the preſent Foot, for purſuing it in ſuch Caſes.

11. It follows from hence, That this inward Approbation of what is right, *&c.* with its conſequent Satisfaction, *&c.* muſt be utterly inſufficient to recommend and enforce the uniform Practice of what is term'd Virtuous. And conſequently, we muſt examine ſomewhat farther into this Point, in order to diſcover what Neceſſity lies upon us to adhere invariably to theſe Rules.

12. The

12. The real Differences of Things known to us by our natural Diſcernment, will point out to us a Rule of Action, which we cannot but approve ſo far as we diſcern it. But then we ſhould obſerve, that if we go no farther, This will be only a Rule, and not properly a Law. A Rule may ſubſiſt without any Suppoſition of a Superior decreeing it, whereas a Law, ſtrictly ſpeaking, always ſuppoſes a Superior.

13. However the inward Satisfaction or Uneaſineſs which reſults from Actions ſuitable or unſuitable to a known Rule, may in many Caſes recommend and enforce that Rule, yet This Recommendation or Enforcement is not, ſtrictly ſpeaking, Obligation. A Man may, on numberleſs Occaſions, be induc'd to do what he is not by any means oblig'd to. Obligation doth not ſignify Inducement of any Kind, whatſoever it be; but That only which ariſes from The Will of a Superior, who hath a Right and Power of enforcing his Will by Suitable Rewards and Puniſhments; and from whom, in Conſequence of this, we either hope the one, or dread the other.

14. Therefore I aſſert, that as all Obligation, ſtrictly ſo call'd, muſt be deriv'd at laſt from the Will of God, ſo without taking God's Will into account there can be no ſufficient Enforcement of the general and uniform Practice of what is term'd Virtue.

But perhaps the chief Difference on this Head is verbal, and relates to the Uſe of theſe Terms *Law* and *Obligation*. Both theſe Expreſſions are ſometimes us'd in a more looſe and popular Senſe, and at other times in one more ſtrict and proper. If the Gentlemen mean by Law, any proper Rule of Action, whether confirm'd by the Will of a Superior or not; and by Obligation, any kind of moral Inducement, whatſoever it be; —— This is a Uſe of the Terms which ſeems to be too looſe, and may poſſibly give ſome Occaſion of Advantage to our Adverſaries. Yet, however this Matter prove, I hope others may be allow'd to uſe theſe Terms in a ſtricter Acceptation without Offence; eſpecially when the Meaning is declar'd, and Guards thrown in againſt all Inconveniences thought to ariſe from this Uſe of them. —— But not to quarrel about mere Words, where we ſee and underſtand one another: On what hath been obſerv'd, I think theſe Reflections may be offer'd, in which, I hope, we ſhall all agree, whatſoever thoſe Terms may be in which we may chuſe to expreſs ourſelves.

1. Upon Suppoſition that Obligation in a certain Senſe, ariſes from the Differences of things perceiv'd by us, and the conſequent Approbation or Diſapprobation of Actions, *&c.* yet muſt it be confeſs'd, that Obligation likewiſe ariſes from the Will of a Superior, who

who enforces his righteous Commands by the Sanctions of Reward and Puniſhment.

2. Foraſmuch as the mere Approbation or Diſapprobation of Actions, together with the conſequent Eſteem or Diſeſteem of the Agents, muſt be entirely ineffectual, where contrary Affections or Paſſions overballance them; or where ſome extraordinary preſent Intereſt interferes; all the ſuppos'd Obligation ariſing from thence muſt, in ſuch Caſes, fail; and conſequently, Obligation founded only in that Principle muſt be defective, as not reaching to all thoſe Caſes to which Virtue is ſuppos'd to extend itſelf.

3. The Will and Command of God, and what follows upon it, ſuitable Reward or Puniſhment, is not only a Superaddition to this natural Motive to Virtue, but likewiſe muſt extend to all poſſible Caſes and Circumſtances; and conſequently is the only thing which can carry with it univerſal and never-failing Obligation.

I ſhall leave it therefore to the Judgment of any reaſonable Man, whether the preſent Hypotheſis, which derives moral Obligation from the Will of God, be not much more ſerviceable to the Cauſe of Virtue, than the Method of building it on the mere Approbation of our Minds, &c. ariſing from our Perception of the Fitneſs or Unfitneſs of

Actions. If theſe Reflections are allowed, I hope I may be excus'd in the preſent Attempt, by thoſe worthy Gentlemen at leaſt, from whom perhaps I differ only in Expreſſion; and eſpecially ſince both Sides have the ſame End in View.

CHAP.

CHAP. II.

Whether The Law or Religion of Nature be abſolutely perfect.

IN the former Chapter I have endeavour'd to ſettle the Meaning of Theſe Terms, *Law* or *Religion of Nature*; and have ſhewn that nothing more can properly be underſtood by them, than ſuch a Collection of moral Principles and Precepts as Men are capable of drawing out for themſelves in the Uſe of that Reaſon, and thoſe ſeveral Opportunities they enjoy. If this be true, it will follow beyond Contradiction, that ſuch a Religion cannot be abſolutely perfect. It cannot be more perfect than human Reaſon itſelf is: And therefore, if human Reaſon is not abſolutely perfect, neither can that Religion be ſo, which reaches no farther than human Reaſon can carry us.

However,

However, tho' I conceive this general Argument is ſufficient to overthrow our Author's bold Aſſertions on this Point; yet, foraſmuch as he builds much upon it, and would infer from hence that any Revelation of a new Law is uſeleſs and impoſſible, it may not be improper to conſider him more diſtinctly.

Much were it to be wiſh'd, that before he had adventur'd to maintain with ſo much Aſſurance a Point, in which the ſoberer Part of the World would be apt to differ from him, he had endeavour'd to make his Meaning clear, by explaining the ſeveral Terms he uſes; That he had told us What he intends by *Perfection*, as apply'd to Law; What by *abſolute Perfection*; and had then produc'd ſuch Arguments as appear'd to prove the Proportion laid down, according to the Senſe in which he had before explain'd it.

But it is remarkable throughout this Author's whole Performance, that he affects Obſcurity beyond meaſure. He ſeldom defines his Terms at all: And if, upon certain Occaſions, he appears to be ſomewhat more explicit, yet in other Parts of his Book he forgets himſelf, and deſerts his own avow'd Interpretations.

Not to go off too far from my Point: Since our Author hath not been ſo kind as to attempt an Explication of theſe Terms, I ſhall introduce what I deſign to offer, by obſerving, That

Thoſe

Thoſe Things are perfect, to which Nothing is wanting.

Thoſe Things are perfect in their Kind, to which nothing is wanting that belongs to Beings of that Rank and Order. And,

Thoſe are abſolutely perfect, to which Nothing of any Kind can poſſibly be added, which would render their State in any Degree better than it is at preſent.

A Difference therefore we ſee there is between *Perfection in its Kind*, and *Perfection abſolute*. Every Sort of Creatures, as enjoying all the Powers which belong to Beings of that Sort, is perfect in its Kind: And yet, notwithſtanding this, there are various Degrees of Perfection in Creatures; nor are there any ſo entirely excellent, in which Something might not be conceiv'd capable of making their State truly better, and conſequently more perfect. But the Supreme Being can receive no Additions of Excellency whatſoever. Nothing can be imagin'd capable of improving or bettering his State. And therefore we affirm of Him, not merely that he is perfect, but that He is abſolutely ſo. This I take to repreſent the general Notion of Perfection. How it may be apply'd to Law or Religion, and what it imports when thus applied, comes now to be conſider'd.

Several Things might here be noted in order to the full Explication of this Article. But not to inſiſt on Matters of leſſer Moment,

I ſhall

I ſhall obſerve, that Perfection, as referr'd to Law, muſt principally be deduc'd from conſidering the Nature, and the End of it.

The Nature of Law conſiſts in This, that it is the Decree of a Superior, given us for the Direction of our Actions, and to which we are oblig'd to conform ourſelves. And the End for which ſuch a Law is, or ought to be given us at all, is, the Attainment of ſome Good either of ourſelves, or others. This End likewiſe may be conſider'd, either, as That ultimate one, to which all Laws whatſoever aim; or elſe, as That which is the immediate View of each particular Branch of it. For this is remarkable, that over and above a general Tendency to their laſt End, which all Means, conſider'd as ſuch, muſt unavoidably have, in frequent Inſtances they have a more immediate Reference to ſomething elſe; and by producing This, they help forward and promote their laſt and moſt general End.

Theſe Things being laid down, it will be proper to obſerve,

1. That as Laws are given us for the Direction of our Actions, and the very Nature of Law doth partly conſiſt in This, ſo the Perfection of it muſt require, that it be perfectly directive; *i. e.* That the Authority on which it reſts be certain; and the Meaning of it clear and eaſy. For where either the Impoſer

is

is unknown; or his Authority queſtionable; or Doubts may ariſe What his real Meaning is, there the Decree wants ſomething, of which it was capable, in order to direct thoſe Perſons for whom it was made.

2. We may obſerve, That Law is the Decree of a Superior to which we are obliged to conform our Actions; and ſince we are bound to Obedience by thoſe Sanctions which enforce the Law, its Perfection muſt require, that it be perfectly enforc'd; *i. e.* its Sanctions muſt be entirely ſufficient to influence the Subject; ſo clearly denounc'd, that no Doubts can ariſe about Them; and ſo weighty, as reaſonably to overballance all Temptations to Diſobedience. Without this, the beſt and moſt wholeſome Directions will be conſider'd rather as prudent Advices, than as ſtrictly and properly Laws.

3. We may obſerve, in reference to the End of Law, That as the Acting what is good, fit, proper, in order to promote The Honour of God and the real Happineſs of ourſelves and our Fellow Creatures, is that which ought to be aim'd at by it, ſo the Perfection of this Law muſt require, that it preſcribe every Thing which is neceſſary or ſerviceable to this purpoſe; every thing whereby the Honour of God may be ſuitably expreſs'd, and the Good both of ourſelves and our Fellow Creatures effectually promoted; In

ſhort,

ſhort, that it be univerſal as to the Matter of it.

To which may be added, Laſtly, That as the Perfection of Law requires, that it preſcribe every Thing which is fit, proper, and good, as having a neceſſary and immediate Reference to the ultimate End of Law; —— ſo likewiſe the ſubordinate Parts of it ſhould be ſuch, as are beſt and fitteſt to obtain their particular and ſubordinate Ends: —— That as it ſhould preſcribe every thing, which being performed is properly virtuous; ſo ſhould it likewiſe ſet forth the beſt and moſt ſuitable Means, whereby the Practice of Virtue may be ſupported and forwarded.

Agreeably to this, *Abſolute Perfection*, as applied to Law, muſt require,

Such a Clearneſs as to the Meaning and Authority of the Law, as can admit of Nothing more in any poſſible Circumſtance.

Such a Strength of Enforcement, as cannot be heighten'd in any way whatſoever.

Such an Extent of Matter, as cannot admit the Addition of any poſſible Article.

Such a Suitableneſs of Means and Motives, that Nothing can ever be laid before us of more or greater Importance. Let the Law or Religion of Nature be examin'd on this Foot.

1. Then I do affirm that the Law of Nature is not abſolutely perfect, becauſe it is deficient in point of Clearneſs; and capable of

of being made more plain by immediate, or even Traditional Revelation, than it is by the meer Reaſoning of our own Minds about it.

And here, how much ſoever I am obliged to differ from this Author on other Occaſions, I am ſupported by him in the preſent Concluſion; ſince he affirms roundly, "As far as "you ſuppoſe God's Laws are not plain to "*any Part* of Mankind, ſo far you derogate "from the Perfection of thoſe Laws." [p. 107. l. 1.] The Gentleman, you ſee, is full and explicit. He maintains, that the Perfection of God's Laws requires, not only that they be plain, but likewiſe that they be plain to all. Should he therefore be able to prove, that every Particular of the Law of Nature is clearly demonſtrable by the Philoſopher, yet even This would not evince the abſolute Perfection of this Law: It ſtill remains, upon his own Foot of Arguing, that theſe Particulars muſt be equally demonſtrable by every Man; For, "As far as you ſuppoſe God's Laws are "not plain to *any Part* of Mankind, ſo far "you derogate from the Perfection of thoſe "Laws."

I know this Paſſage is applied by this Gentleman to a Purpoſe very different from that, for which it is here produc'd by me. He maintains, (and hath endeavour'd to evince by Arguments which ſhall be conſider'd hereafter) that the Law of Nature is abſolutely perfect.

If

If ſo, it muſt, ſaith he, be clear and plain to every Man; becauſe it is inconſiſtent with The Notion of abſolute Perfection in this Law, That it ſhould be difficult or obſcure to any. We diſagree therefore in This; Our Author would infer from the ſuppos'd abſolute Perfection of this Law, that it muſt be clear and plain to all; I, on the other hand, contend againſt this abſolute Perfection, from its Deficiency in point of Clearneſs.

Our Author, we have ſeen, maintains, that The Law or Religion of Nature is plain and clear to all, —— to every Part of Mankind. An Aſſertion this too bold, where it is in the Power of any ſingle Perſon to contradict him without any Poſſibility of being refuted. For tho' it ſhould be admitted, (which I am yet very far from granting,) that every Article in the Law of Nature is plain and evident to Some, —— to Perſons, for inſtance, of Parts and Learning; yet, How does it follow from hence, that it muſt be plain and evident to Every one? Surely ſome Difference will be made between Men; and the Slave will not be put on an equal Foot with the Philoſopher.

This Gentleman ſhall be allow'd to underſtand his own Abilities perfectly; and to tell us, if he pleaſes, not only what he actually knows, but likewiſe what he is capable of knowing, if he will take any Care about it. But then, I hope he will make ſome Return for this Conceſſion;

Conceſſion; and acknowledge that he is not quite ſo well acquainted with the Capacities of other Men. And if he expects to be credited when he aſſures us, that The Law of Nature, as comprehending under it every Thing fit and proper, is perfectly known to him, and ſo exceedingly obvious that nothing can make it more evident; he ſhould allow that others are as proper Judges of their own Abilities as he is of his.

Let us go no farther than his own Draught of natural Religion: This, ſhort and imperfect as it is, contains ſeveral Things in it, which, tho' they ſhould be in themſelves true, and proveable to Men of Parts and Skill, are yet far from being plain and obvious even to Them; much more are they from being ſo to all Men. Put the Caſe of a Debate ariſing about the Meaning or Evidence of ſome of his Propoſitions. This ſurely may be ſuppos'd at leaſt: How, I pray, would this Gentleman behave on the Occaſion? Would he think it ſufficient to affirm, that every Thing was too plain to need either Explication or Proof? Might not his Adverſary reply, that He was beſt Judge of his own Underſtanding; that the Propoſitions were to him doubtful and obſcure, and the Evidence of their Truth, in whatſoever Senſe underſtood, precarious? Surely, as every Man is beſt acquainted with his own Capacities, ſo in Caſes of this Nature he muſt be allowed to anſwer for himſelf.

Some Points there are ſelf-evident; which neither need nor are really capable of Proof. Others are ſo immediately connected with ſelf-evident Propoſitions, that as ſoon as laid before us their Truth appears, and we can entertain no Doubt about them. Thus, "The "Whole is greater than a Part"; and conſequently "Things may be affirm'd of The "Whole, or of all the Parts taken together, "which cannot be affirm'd of any ſingle Part "ſeparately taken." Matters of this Kind are plain and obvious; ſince they muſt be clear to every one who is capable of thinking at all about them. But the Caſe is different where Ideas are exceedingly complex, and the Propoſition advanc'd muſt receive Proof from a long Train of Arguing. In ſuch Inſtances few are capable of entering far into Matters. Truth becomes obſcure; and cannot eaſily be diſcover'd by themſelves, or made plain by others.

To apply this to the Caſe in hand: The more general Rules of Morality, ſuch as are theſe; "That God is to be honour'd and "obey'd;——That the Rules of Juſtice and "Charity ſhould be obſerv'd," and the like, are, I conceive, ſo plain, that no Doubts can ariſe about them. But then I would beg to know, Whether every thing elſe be ſo exceedingly clear to all? Whether many Queſtions may not ariſe, How and in What Manner God ſhould be honour'd;—— In What Particulars we

we may beſt expreſs our Obedience; —— What are the ſeveral Inſtances of Juſtice; and What the Meaſures and Extent of Charity? Theſe Things are not quite ſo clear to all, merely on the Foot of their natural Reaſon; and concerning which each Man hath a Right to anſwer for himſelf, how far they are clear and plain.

But not to reſt in this, I muſt obſerve farther, That as Religion implies not only the ſeveral Precepts which immediately direct our Actions, but likewiſe the ſeveral Doctrines which ſerve either to prove or enforce theſe Precepts; ſo the Clearneſs of a Religion muſt require a like Clearneſs in theſe Doctrines. And ſince our Author affirms, that the Perfection of the Law or Religion of Nature requires it ſhould be plain to all Mankind, the Perfection of this Law or Religion muſt require, that every Part of it, as well Doctrines as Precepts, ſhould be clear to all: To which I may fairly add, that they muſt be not only clear, but abſolutely ſo; evident to ſuch a Degree, that nothing can poſſibly make them more ſo. Yet, is this Fact; or, is there the leaſt Shadow of Truth in the Aſſertion?

The Gentleman I am contending with muſt allow, that all thoſe Points are Doctrines of Natural Religion, which, having ſome Reference to natural Duty, are either actually known, or at leaſt capable of being ſo. Such

are, " The Exiſtence of a God "; the firſt Ground and Foundation of all Religion whatſoever; " The Reality of a Providence; " The ſeveral Propoſitions which regard " The Divine Perfections; and Thoſe like- " wiſe, which expreſs the Relations in which " we ſtand to God and other Beings. " I do not affirm that every thing of this Kind is ſimply diſcoverable in the Uſe of every Man's Reaſon: Indeed I cannot think it is: Yet, ſuppoſing it were ſo, ſtill many Things may be ſimply diſcoverable, which are not plain.

And indeed in Proof that ſeveral Matters, with reference to the Divine Perfections, are not quite ſo clear to all Mankind, we need only obſerve the frequent, and ſometimes general Errors they have run themſelves into on theſe Heads. Truths, plain and evident to all, will be diſputed by few; at leaſt in thoſe Inſtances, in which their Intereſts and Paſſions are not immediately concern'd. In Matters Self-evident, it is ſcarce poſſible to impoſe on any one. In Matters immediately connected with things Self-evident, it is difficult to deceive Men. But in things remote from common Apprehenſions, and where extraordinary Attention is neceſſary, Errors are frequent. But then I affirm that Matters of this Nature are not clear and plain to all: If they were ſo, Men would be no more liable to err in theſe Points, than any others aſſign-

able: And if abſolute Evidence be irreſiſtable, where ſuch Evidence is, Error muſt be impoſſible.

From Doctrines let us proceed to Precepts, and ſee how Matters ſtand there. What hath been obſerv'd above will be found proportionably true on this Head likewiſe; with this Difference however, that Men's Corrupt Paſſions being more immediately intereſted in Matters of Practice than Belief, they will from hence be induc'd to conſider Things with a greater Mixture of Partiality. This muſt, I think, be allow'd: Yet, on the other hand, it ought to be conſider'd, that as theſe Rules of Life are oftentimes deducible from Religious Doctrines, they muſt be ſtill farther remov'd from Firſt and Self-evident Propoſitions, than theſe Doctrines themſelves are; and conſequently, they muſt in Proportion be leſs clear and plain.

Our Author aſſerts, that to deny a Law is plain to all, muſt derogate from its Perfection. To maintain therefore its abſolute Perfection, we muſt maintain its abſolute Clearneſs. And ſince The Law or Religion of Nature includes under it not only a few general Rules, but likewiſe the ſeveral particular Precepts relating to what is right and fit; it follows, that theſe Precepts likewiſe muſt be abſolutely clear to all; and, of Conſequence, they muſt all of them be equally clear; it being impoſſible there

ſhould be any Difference of Degrees with regard to abſolute Clearneſs or Perfection. Let us ſee therefore, whether all the ſeveral Precepts of Morality are equally clear and plain.

And here it might be obſerv'd in general, that as theſe Precepts are more nearly, or more remotely connected with firſt Principles, they muſt of courſe be proveable with greater or leſs Diſpatch and Eaſe; and conſequently, the Evidence of ſuch Points muſt admit different Degrees of Clearneſs.

Or, if this be queſtion'd, the Matter may be put beyond all manner of Doubt by producing Inſtances. To deſtroy the Life of another Man without ſufficient Cauſe or Provocation, is ſo clearly wrong, that no Perſon, who thinks at all, can misjudge about it; and ſo the Precept againſt Murther may be thought abundantly plain and evident. But can the ſame be affirm'd of *Suicide*? May it not ſeem at firſt Sight, and to a Perſon unus'd to think deeply, that Men have ſomewhat greater Power over themſelves, than they have over other Men? and that as Life is valuable, only conſider'd as the Foundation of Happineſs, ſo when it becomes the Ground of Miſery, Men have the ſame Liberty to quit Life, as they have to decline Miſery? I am not now pleading for Self-Murther; nor do I do think in the leaſt that Arguments of this Kind are ſtrictly con-

cluſive,

cluſive. All I contend for, is, that the Unlawfulneſs of Suicide, (how unfit ſoever the thing may be in itſelf,) is not quite ſo clear, as the Unlawfulneſs of Murther; That ſome Points therefore in Morality are leſs clear than others; and conſequently, that all are not abſolutely clear and plain.

Thus again; The common Offices of Humanity are ſo exceedingly ſuited to our natural Inclinations, and the plain Reaſon of the Thing, that no Queſtions can ariſe, Whether we are not concern'd to embrace every Opportunity of diſcharging them. This Point therefore is plain and clear to all. However, it may be juſtly thought, that as we are concern'd to ſhew a proper Regard for others, ſo we have ſtill a Right to have ſome Reſpect to ourſelves: And it is not quite ſo clear, How far we ought to ſacrifice our own Intereſts to thoſe of other Men. At leaſt every one will not be able to ſee immediately, that he is oblig'd to lay down his Life for others; not only to throw up all Advantages he enjoys, but the very Foundation of them likewiſe. This is indeed proper to be done on certain Occaſions; But we are not now diſcourſing about the real Fitneſs of the Thing, but the Evidence of the Precept.

Once more; There is hardly any one Point in Morality, which doth not admit of various Degrees of Clearneſs in different Pe-

riods of Life. The very ſame Man muſt perceive things in different Lights, as Experience and Study ſhall open his Mind, and gradually improve his Reaſon. Can any one affirm, that he had the ſame View of every Point of Morality when he firſt employ'd his Thoughts about it, which he afterwards had upon Increaſe of Years, and a Maturity of Conſideration? But if ſome Things are capable of becoming more clear by an advantageous Change of Circumſtances, then 'tis certain they are not abſolutely clear to all: and every Man who doth but reflect a little on his own gradual Progreſs in moral Wiſdom and Knowledge, muſt be conſcious of this Truth.

If it ſhould be reply'd to this, that the Queſtion before us relating to the Law or Religion of Nature, muſt concern thoſe only who are arriv'd at a Maturity of Judgment; and conſequently, no Room can be allow'd for putting Caſes of unripe or uncultivated Reaſon; If This, I ſay, ſhould be alledg'd, I muſt beg to know, Whether Men are not to be accounted Moral Agents till they come to the full Uſe and Exerciſe of their Judgment; If they are, then the Religion of Nature muſt concern Them as well as other Men: For, Thoſe only are free from Law, who are abſolutely incapable of knowing it. Obſcurity may detract from its abſolute Perfection, but doth not deſtroy its Nature.

After

After all, tho' we ſhould give up this Argument, and confine our Debate to thoſe Perſons only, who are arriv'd at a Maturity of Years; yet ſtill, Can it be affirm'd, that every Point of moral Import is plain and clear to all? Hath it ever prov'd ſo to the beſt and wiſeſt Philoſophers? Whence then hath ariſen their great Uncertainty in ſome Points, and their Error in others? Whence ſuch Contradictions in their ſeveral Syſtems, —— ſome teaching as Matters of Duty what others condemn'd as impious? It would be ſufficient for my purpoſe if I produc'd any one ſingle Inſtance, either of Doubt, or of Miſtake in any One Philoſopher, who appear'd to have conſider'd Matters with tolerable Care; becauſe our Author allows, that the abſolute Perfection of the Law of Nature requires it ſhould be plain to *all*. But when we find that all of them have err'd in many Points, What other Concluſion can we draw than This, That however attainable a full and diſtinct Knowledge in theſe Matters may be thought, yet there is great Difficulty in making ſuch Attainments; and conſequently, that The Law of Nature is not, even with reſpect to the Wiſeſt Men, abſolutely clear and plain.

But, if this ſhall be found true even with reſpect to Wiſe and Great Men, and thoſe who have devoted themſelves to the Study of moral Truth, What greater Clearneſs can we

we expect to find with regard to the Vulgar and Illiterate? Things are clear and plain in reference to the Apprehenſions of thoſe Perſons to whom they are propos'd. To Men of leſs Capacities, they muſt conſequently be leſs plain: and therefore, we may argue *à fortiori*, that all Things of a moral Nature neither are, nor can be abſolutely plain to all.

This, which may appear by reaſoning from the Nature of Things, will be farther confirm'd if we conſider Fact, and what are the real Sentiments of Mankind concerning moral Matters. Upon Examination we may find, that the Generality have clear and full Conceptions of very few Things: Their Ideas, in moſt Caſes, are obſcure and perplex'd: and thoſe they have, will be found to be rather borrow'd, in their laſt Reſult, from ſome Divine Inſtruction, than produc'd by their own Reaſonings about them. So far is human Underſtanding, as it ſubſiſts in Fact, from being capable of thoſe Great Matters which are ſometimes aſcrib'd to it!

2. The next Point to be conſider'd is This; Whether The Law or Religion of Nature be enforc'd in a manner abſolutely perfect, *i. e.* by Sanctions not only clear and certain, but ſuch likewiſe, that nothing greater or more forceable can poſſibly be conceiv'd by us.

Yet,

Yet, before I enter on this Point, it will be proper to guard againſt Miſapprehenſion, and to ſhew in what Senſe I deſire to be underſtood here. I do ſuppoſe therefore that there is a Liberty ſubſiſting in human Nature, *i. e.* a Power of acting or not acting as we pleaſe. Without this there could be no ſuch Thing as moral Agency in Man at all: All Laws would be vain; and their Sanctions of courſe fruitleſs. Of this Liberty every Man is conſcious. And tho' Difficulties may be ſtarted as well on this, as ſeveral other Points, to which we may not be able to give diſtinct Solutions, yet we are certain of the Thing itſelf; and as intimately conſcious of it, as we are of our very Being.

This Liberty being ſuppos'd, I do affirm, that the moſt abſolute Enforcement of Law muſt conſiſt with this Liberty; and conſequently, muſt be ſuch, as may be either neglected, or withſtood. I do therefore by no means argue againſt the abſolute Perfection of the Law of Nature from hence merely, that the Sanctions of it do often miſs their Effect. This might happen, however perfect we ſhould ſuppoſe theſe Sanctions in their own Nature. For, whilſt Liberty ſubſiſts, a Power muſt remain of neglecting theſe Sanctions; and what Law itſelf eſſentially ſuppoſes, the Sanctions of Law cannot poſſibly deſtroy.

This,

This, I ſay, being ſuppos'd, *viz.* That there is a Liberty eſſential to Human Nature, which no Enforcements of Law whatſoever can deſtroy; and conſequently, that as Law itſelf is a moral Rule, ſo the Enforcements of Law muſt be moral Enforcements; which not being abſolutely irreſiſtible, may miſs their Effect, either thro' Inattention or Obſtinacy; I proceed to ſhew, on What Foot I maintain, that the Sanctions of the Law of Nature are not abſolutely perfect.

Now the firſt and moſt obvious Sanctions are thoſe which ariſe from the natural Tendencies and Conſequences of Men's Actions. Thus, Temperance, Contentment, Patience, Meekneſs, and the like, are really conducive to our natural Good; and the contrary Vices carry with them certain Degrees of natural Evil. This holds true in all thoſe Duties which properly reſpect ourſelves. But then it ſhould be obſerv'd, that the Connection between Duty and Happineſs is not equally apparent in all Caſes. In ſome the Effects, however real, are yet ſo remotely join'd to their Cauſes, that every Man is not apt to diſcover them: And ſo far forth as Sanctions of this Kind eſcape Obſervation, they muſt loſe their proper Uſe, *viz.* the Enforcement of the Law.

But the greateſt Difficulties will ariſe with regard to the Offices between Man and Man; in which, tho' there be ſome natural Advantages

vantages which frequently attend the Diſcharge of Duty, yet, on many Occaſions, Intereſt may draw the other Way. Men may find a preſent Account much better by Injuſtice or Treachery, than by Faith and Uprightneſs: And it may happen, by a Concurrence of untoward Circumſtances, that an Adhering to the ſtrict Rules of Virtue ſhall ruin thoſe very Intereſts, which ought to be ſupported by it.

If, in aid of theſe natural Sanctions, (which cannot but appear inſufficient to ſupport the univerſal Practice of Virtue;) If, I ſay, in aid of theſe, The Civil Power be called in, yet ſtill This Expedient will fail us: —— Not only, becauſe Sanctions of this Kind not belonging to The Law of Nature, purely as ſuch, concern it only as that Law is confirm'd by The Civil Power; but likewiſe, becauſe on this Foot Virtue will be enforced no farther than perhaps weak or corrupt Men are pleas'd to ſupport it: And if Civil Authority ſhould come into bad Hands, Virtue may find Diſcouragement; and the Intereſts of Vice be ſupported by thoſe Powers, which ought to ſuppreſs it. To which may be added, that however juſt, wiſe, and good the Adminiſtration of Things may be, yet ſtill as Abundance of Evil may be committed, which muſt eſcape the Obſervation of Men, ſo the univerſal Practice of Virtue can find no Support this way. Men have neither Power enough

enough to reward every Thing which is right, nor to puniſh every Thing which is wrong; nor have they Knowledge ſufficient to direct the Exerciſe of that power they enjoy.

After all, it may perhaps be thought, that what-ever is wanting either in the Natural or Civil Sanctions of Virtue, will be made up by the ordinary Diſpenſations of Providence; and conſequently, that Men may expect from The Divine Adminiſtration the Support of thoſe Laws, which cannot, on any other Foot, be maintain'd. But then, will Fact and Experience juſtify theſe Preſumptions? Is it found, that every good Man proſpers in Proportion to his ſteady Love of Virtue, and that every bad Man ſuffers as he turns aſide from the Paths of Righteouſneſs? Hath not the Queſtion concerning The unequal Diſtribution of Good and Evil in the preſent Life, exerciſed Mens Minds in all Ages; and put them upon ſeveral Expedients, either to ſolve or to break thro' the Difficulty?

The wiſer and better Sort indeed have reaſon'd well; and argu'd, that as God muſt have an unalterable Love of Righteouſneſs, ſo He cannot be ſuppos'd to leave its Intereſts entirely unſupported. If therefore the preſent Management of Things will not admit a perfect Adjuſtment, yet Amends may be made hereafter; and this hath led them to the Perſuaſion of a future State.

And

And yet it appears by the Remains of the beſt Writers of Antiquity, that they rather wiſh'd and hop'd for ſomething of this Kind, than firmly and ſteadily believed it. Not a few expreſly rejected this Doctrine: And thoſe others, who upon ſome Occaſions diſcover'd a great Forwardneſs to entertain it, or had advanc'd exceeding probable Auguments for the Support of it, yet could not forbear intimating their Diſtruſt, and a Suſpicion at leaſt that Matters might poſſibly prove otherwiſe.

However, let us make the moſt of this; and ſuppoſe that Theſe Great and Good Men had not only ſatisfy'd their own Minds in ſo concerning a Point, but (which is more,) had happily gain'd a ſtrict Demonſtration on this Head: Yet ſtill, before this Doctrine of future Rewards and Puniſhments can have its full Force on the World, the reſt of Mankind muſt be equally ſatisfied likewiſe. They muſt either diſcover the Proof themſelves, or apprehend it clearly when diſcover'd by others. Any thing ſhort of this muſt fail them. For the Force of Temptations will not be born down by ſlight Preſumptions of what (for any thing They can prove) may never be.

Now to this Purpoſe it is neceſſary, that the follwing Points be clear'd:

1. That the Mind or Soul is really diſtinct from the Body; and that it may, and neceſſarily

ſarily muſt ſurvive the Deſtruction of it. For, without this, there is no ſufficient Foundation left for a future State, nor conſequently for future Rewards or Puniſhments.

2. It muſt be prov'd, That as The Soul ſurvives the Body, ſo it muſt likewiſe exiſt in a conſcious State; For, to exiſt without a Conſciouſneſs of what happens, is to all Intents and Purpoſes the ſame as not to exiſt at all. And,

Laſtly, That in this future State The Soul ſhall be conſcious either of Happineſs or Miſery in Proportion to its good or evil Conduct in the preſent Life. For otherwiſe, what-ever Good or Evil ſhall happen, it cannot be conſider'd under the Notion of Reward or Puniſhment; nor conſequently, as the Sanction of Divine Laws at all.

Theſe Points, I ſay, are neceſſary to be clear'd, in order to prove a future State, on the Foot of natural Reaſon. And tho' I am fully perſuaded they are all of them capable of Proof; and perhaps have, many Ages ſince, been made good by ſome Wiſe and Good Men; yet, they are Matters too much involv'd to be made apparent to the Bulk and Generality of Mankind. How few are there capable of entering ſo far into abſtract and metaphyſical Reaſoning, as to diſcern clearly all the ſeveral Steps neceſſary in this Argument? And if theſe cannot be perceiv'd diſtinctly, as the whole Evidence

Evidence will be obſcure, ſo the Effects of this Doctrine on the Lives of Men will be proportionably ſmall.

I do by no means deny but a certain Perſuaſion there hath generally been amongſt Mankind, that they ſhall, ſome time or other, enjoy or ſuffer in Proportion as they have behaved well or ill. And That little Virtue, which hath been practis'd in the World, hath received its chief Support from this Principle. But then it deſerves to be conſider'd, that a Difference ought to be made between common and extraordinary Occaſions. Where Temptations are ſlight, and the Proſpect even of temporal Convenience ſhall help to ballance them, Men may eaſily be induc'd by the Hopes, and even Suſpicions of a future State. But let us ſee how Matters are like to ſtand, when Paſſions or Appetites urge ſtrongly; when Opportunities of doing ill preſent themſelves, without the Hazard of preſent Diſcovery or Puniſhment; when the ſticking firm to Virtue ſhall not only hinder preſent Advancement, but perhaps draw after it a long Train of Inconvenience: Let us only ſuppoſe, that by turning aſide from the Rules of Righteouſneſs, Men may ſecure to themſelves all the Advantages This Life can give them; and by an obſtinate Adherence to its Intereſts, muſt forfeit even Life itſelf. What ſhall, in ſuch a Caſe be ſufficient to fix their Choice?

If indeed they are as certain of the future as they are of the preſent, then a wiſe Man will have no Room to deliberate. But if theſe Proſpects are doubtful and inſecure; and ſupported only by a Perſuaſion, of which they know not how to give a rational Account, the Effect of it muſt be as ſlight as the Perſuaſion itſelf is. For we may eaſily aſſure ourſelves, Men will not, in any very concerning Points, throw up preſent Certainties for the Sake of future Poſſibilities.

After all, Let us ſuppoſe that the Evidence of a future State were equally clear to all Men. On this Foot the Laws of Nature would be attended with Sanctions truly excellent; and ſuch as could not but have a conſiderable Weight with all thoſe who ſhould ſeriouſly attend to them. Yet ſtill I can by no means agree with this Gentleman, That even Theſe Enforcements would be abſolutely perfect. My Reaſon, in ſhort, is This: No Enforcements can be abſolutely perfect, where any thing more perfect in That Kind can be conceiv'd: And whether a future State of Rewards and Puniſhments in the general, (which is all that can be concluded from natural Reaſon,) can come up to this, deſerves our Conſideration.

All that Human Reaſon, how much ſoever improv'd, can ſuggeſt on this Head, is, That the Advantages of Obedience ſhall, upon the whole,

whole, over-ballance the Diſadvantages; and that a Man ſhall gain more by ſticking firm to the Cauſe of Virtue, than can poſſibly be had in a contrary Courſe. What therefore theſe Rewards or Puniſhments ſhall be; —— How great; —— How laſting, doth by no means appear. But will any one affirm, that ſuch general Sanctions are quite ſo perfect as thoſe which are more diſtinct, more full, more explicit? Are Temporary Enforcements to be compar'd with Eternal; or, are Men full as likely to be influenc'd by the View of ſome indeterminate Good or Ill, (how great, how laſting they know not,) as they are by the certain Expectations of exceeding Happineſs or Miſery, to which nothing can ever put an End?

The Sanctions of Law are to be conſider'd under the Notion of Means; the End of which muſt be Obedience to the Law. Thoſe therefore which are moſt apt to produce this End, are in their Nature moſt perfect. And if the Proſpect of Eternal Happineſs or Miſery be more likely to attain this End, than the Proſpect of ſuch only as is temporary or ſhort; then it follows, that the former Sanctions muſt be more perfect than the latter. The Conſequence from hence is certain; That foraſmuch as mere Natural Reaſon cannot prove the Eternity of future Rewards or Puniſhments, it cannot ſuggeſt to us ſuch

Sanctions of The Law of Nature, as are abſolutely perfect.

3. A Third Article on which I would examine the Perfection of this Law, is, Whether it be univerſal as to its Extent; I mean, Whether it comprehends under it every Thing which is, or may be fit and proper Matter of that Law.

To this Purpoſe a good deal hath been already offered in the former Chapter. I have there endeavour'd to evince, that Nothing can be to us a Law which is not by us diſcoverable; from which it follows, that Nothing is to us a Law, or Part of The Law of Nature, which is not by us diſcoverable in the Uſe of Reaſon. If therefore the Law of Nature be univerſal as to its Extent, it follows, that every Man is capable of diſcovering all Things which are in their Nature fit, and therefore proper Matter of Law. But is this really Fact? Is there exactly the ſame Capacity in all? and do not the very ſame Perſons vary from themſelves in this Reſpect, as they grow more in Years, and greater Opportunities of Learning and Improvement are put into their Hands?

It will be in vain to reply here, that "All "Men have Means of Knowledge ſufficient "for the Circumſtances They are in." If the Gentleman intends, that a Juſt and Merciful God will treat Men in Proportion to the Means

Means and Opportunities they enjoy, and the Uſe they are found to make of them, what he aſſerts is true. In this Senſe every Man hath ſufficient Means of Knowledge: And it is on this Foot I maintain, that no Man is, or can be oblig'd to Rules he is abſolutely incapable of knowing. But then the Queſtion is, Whether every Man is capable of knowing all Things, which are of real Moment to him; all thoſe Fitneſſes, which if diſcover'd would point out to him the Will of God, and carry with them moral Obligation? If not, then however his own Law of Nature may be to him ſufficient, and in that Senſe perfect, yet it cannot be juſtly thought all-ſufficient, or all-perfect; it cannot be reaſonably eſteem'd abſolutely perfect.

In Proof of the Point, I am here concern'd to make good, ſeveral Things have indeed been ſuggeſted in the former Chapter; from which I would not willingly borrow, nor trouble the Reader with needleſs Repetitions. Yet 'tis a difficult Matter to avoid every Thing of that Kind: And ſince theſe Arguments are now produc'd for a Purpoſe different from what they ſerv'd before, I ſhall be excus'd if I reſume them here, whilſt I endeavour to give them a new Turn, and place them in a different Order.

It hath been obſerv'd, That Nothing can be to us a Law, which we are incapable of knowing; and therefore, Nothing can be to

us any Part of The Law of Nature, which we are incapable of diſcovering by our natural Reaſon.

Theſe Things being laid down, we may argue,

1. That as ſoon as Men come to ſuch a Degree of Reaſon as to diſcover the Being of a God, and to be ſatisfied of his Providence over us, They muſt be ſenſible of their Obligations to obey his Will; But, Wherein his Will conſiſts, or, What are the Particulars in which they may teſtify their Obedience, is the great Point in Queſtion.

Thus much in general may appear obvious enough: That as God is The Author of Nature, He muſt be preſum'd to will whatſoever ſhall be found ſuitable to the Condition and Relations in which Men ſtand: But then, What Particulars are really proper in theſe Reſpects, is another Queſtion, and not ſo eaſily to be decided.

Some Inſtances may be clear enough, and offer themſelves to the Mind upon the very firſt Reflection. Yet others are more remote; Time, and Obſervation, and Study may be neceſſary as well in Moral as Natural Science; and it is ſeen in Fact, that Men gradually improve as well in the one as the other.

Now, if this be the Caſe; and if Nothing can be properly a Law to any Man, whilſt he

he is incapable of knowing it; it will follow, that our Law of Nature, in our more early Years at leaſt, is defective in Extent; For, it Then comes ſhort of thoſe things which are afterwards knowable; and which, as ſoon as they are ſo, carry with them moral Obligation. To ſay, that ſuch a Law as This, is abſolutely perfect, is to affirm, that a Part is equal to the Whole.

It may be obſerv'd, 2dly, That as Men differ very much from each other in Degrees of natural Capacity, and the Opportunities, whether of improving their rational Powers, or of applying them to the Diſcovery of thoſe Truths to which they are perhaps equal; ſo it is evident, their ſeveral Syſtems of moral Precepts muſt be more or leſs compleat. I have noted heretofore, how much the Philoſophers had, in this Reſpect, an Advantage over the Bulk of Mankind. But, if Nothing is to any Man a Law which he is incapable of knowing, whether thro' Want of Capacity or Opportunity; it follows, that The Law of Nature, as it regards The Bulk of Mankind, muſt be defective in Extent; becauſe, with regard to them, it muſt be leſs extenſive than with regard to The Philoſopher.

It will be to no Purpoſe to reply, That as no one can be bound to thoſe Things he is incapable of knowing, ſo every Man's Law reaching to all Things which are to him Matters of Duty, it muſt therefore, with

regard to him be perfectly extenſive: This Anſwer, I ſay, is vain: For, the preſent Queſtion, is, Not Whether every Man's Law be to him a perfect, *i. e.* a ſufficient Rule of Duty; —— but, Whether it be ſo perfect, as to take in every thing which is proper Matter of Law: Not, Whether his Law be relatively perfect; but, Whether it be abſolutely ſo.

To go on; 3dly, We may obſerve, that the ſeveral Schemes of Morality advanc'd by the Philoſophers were in many reſpects different from each other; ſome of them inculcating what others either neglected or oppos'd. The main Points were indeed admitted and contended for by the ſeveral Sects; But whilſt they differ'd in others, the Laws which the Reaſon of each ſeverally taught them, could with no Propriety be term'd the ſame. Now, as far forth as any of theſe Schemes fell ſhort, in any Point of moral Concern; I ſay, as far as they fell ſhort of what was well advanc'd by any other Sect, ſo far, at leaſt, it fail'd in point of Extent. And, Whether This hath not prov'd the Caſe, muſt be ſubmitted to every one who will give himſelf the Pains to ſearch.

To this ſhall be added, Laſtly, That as Human Reaſon, whether we conſider it as ſubſiſting in ſingle Perſons, or as diſpers'd thro' our whole Kind, is imperfect, ſo it cannot take in all the Relations ſubſiſting

ing in Nature; nor conſequently, all the Fitneſſes reſulting from theſe Relations. Now, if all theſe Relations, and all theſe Fitneſſes are not diſcoverable by us in the Uſe of our Reaſon; and if nothing is to us a Law, which is by us undiſcoverable; it muſt follow, that our Law of Nature cannot poſſibly reach to every thing which is fit and proper Matter of that Law; and conſequently, as it is not abſolutely extenſive, it cannot be abſolutely perfect.

On the other ſide of this Queſtion our Author hath alledg'd Two Arguments. The Firſt is preſumptive, and deſign'd to prove, that our Law of Nature muſt take in every Thing which makes for the Good of our Souls, *i. e.* muſt be perfectly extenſive; becauſe he apprehends it is inconſiſtent with the Goodneſs of God to order Matters otherwiſe. The Second maintains, that all the particular Rules of Morality are reducible to One or Two Principles, which are allow'd on all Hands to be knowable by every Man concern'd in the preſent Queſtion.

The former we meet with *p.* 11. where this Gentleman expreſſes himſelf in the following manner; "Can it be ſuppos'd, that "an infinitely Good and Gracious Being, "which gives Men Notice by their Senſes "what does Good or Hurt to their Bodies, "has had leſs Regard for the immortal Part, "and has not given them at all Times, by

"the

" the Light of their Underſtanding, ſuffi-
" cient Means to diſcover what makes for the
" Good of their Souls; but has neceſſitated
" them, or any of them, to continue from
" Age to Age in deſtructive Ignorance or
" Error? "

There are Two Things contain'd in this Argument; *Firſt*, that the Goodneſs of God requires he ſhould give Men by the Light of their Underſtanding ſufficient Means to diſcover What [*i. e.* whatſoever] makes for the Good of their Souls. And *2dly*, That this is ſuitable to his Conduct towards the animal Part of us; For, He gives Men Notice, by their Senſes, what does Good or Hurt to their Bodies.

I ſhall chuſe to begin my Remarks on this latter Poſition; becauſe, by overthrowing this, I ſhall weaken the former, which derives a great Part of its Strength from it. Now, is This Fact, That God gives Men Notice by their Senſes what does Good or Hurt to their Bodies? Is it true, that Men perceive before-hand whatſoever is likely to be ſerviceable or prejudicial to them? I ſay, before-hand, becauſe the Notices, which come afterwards, come too late to direct them what they ſhould either chuſe or avoid. So far is this from being the real State of Things, that in moſt Caſes Men learn what is Good or Bad rather from Experience of their ſeveral Effects, than from any forego-

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ing Notices which their Senſes give them: And this is the true Reaſon why Perſons, in their earlier Years, are apt ſo frequently to err this way. Now, if our Author's Aſſertion here be groundleſs and wrong, then his Argument for a like extenſive Knowledge of what relates to the Mind, muſt be defective likewiſe.

But, the Gentleman carries the Matter ſtill farther; and endeavours to infer his Point from the infinite Goodneſs of the Divine Being. "This, he ſays, requires, He "ſhould give them, by the Light of their "Underſtanding, ſufficient Means to diſco-"ver What [*i. e.* whatſoever] makes for the "Good of their Souls": Theſe Means therefore He hath in Fact given them.

Now, I conceive, it is much ſafer and more reaſonable to argue from known Fact to What is really fit and right for God to do, than to endeavour the Overthrow of What is certain Fact, by uncertain Preſumptions what the Divine Attributes require. We are ſure, ſince our Knowledge is imperfect, *i. e.* ſince our Nature is ſo, we neither do, nor poſſibly can know all the Reaſons and Fitneſſes of Things; We cannot poſſibly diſcover every thing, which might conduce to our moral Perfection; nor conſequently, every thing, which might make for our Good. From hence we may juſtly infer, that ſuch a Conſtitution is really conſiſtent with

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The Divine Goodneſs: And, if this Gentleman ſtill thinks otherwiſe, I would deſire him to conſider the Principle into which the Argument he alledges muſt unavoidably reſolve itſelf, *viz.* Abſolute Goodneſs requires the Production of all that Good, which is capable of being produc'd. If this be admitted, then it muſt require likewiſe, that every Man ſhould be capable of all poſſible Good; and conſequently, that he ſhould be poſſeſs'd of all poſſible Perfection; and That, as there ought to be no Difference between particular Men in this reſpect, ſo neither ſhould there be ſo between any Creatures whatſoever. —— I forbear purſuing this Matter farther: It will end, we ſee, not barely in *Deiſm*, but *Atheiſm*.

To return; Thus much may indeed be concluded from the Divine Goodneſs, that no Man is plac'd in ſuch Circumſtances, as ſhall make him miſerable [finally and irrecoverably ſo] without his own Fault; and conſequently, that every Man enjoys the Means of Knowledge, ſo far as may be ſufficient to prevent the Anger of God, and the Miſeries of another Life. But how far God is concern'd to beſtow Favours, *i. e.* in what Meaſure and Proportion, is a Matter of which we are entirely incapable of judging. And, if we cannot affirm that Goodneſs requires Men ſhould enjoy the higheſt Degrees of Happineſs, neither doth it require they ſhould en-

joy equally the Means and Opportunities of attaining it. The Conſequence from hence is clear; That notwithſtanding God is infinitely, *i. e.* abſolutely Good and Gracious, yet He may not give Men, by the Light of their Underſtanding, ſufficient Means to diſcover what [*i. e.* whatſoever] makes for the Good of their Souls.

The next Argument by which our Author would prove The Law of Nature to be abſolutely extenſive, is This; All the particular Rules of Morality whatſoever are reducible to One or Two Principles, which are allow'd on all Hands to be knowable by every Man concern'd in the preſent Queſtion.

It is variouſly ſtated in the Beginning of his Seventh Chapter; and that I may not be thought to injure him, I ſhall chuſe to repreſent it in his own Words. "If, ſays he, "our natural Notions of the Divine Per- "fections demonſtrate that God will require "Nothing of his Creatures but what tends to "their Good; Whatſoever is of this Kind, "is a Superſtructure which belongs to the "Law of Nature." Again; "It is evi- "dent by the Light of Nature what are "thoſe Relations we ſtand in to God and "our Fellow Creatures; and neither God, "nor Man, without acting tyrannically, can "require more than theſe require." Again; "Original Revelation contains every thing "obligatory upon account of its Excellency;

i. e.

" *i. e.* every thing which tends to the Ho-
" nour of God, or the Good of Man." Once more; " By The Law of Nature, as " well as the Goſpel, The Honour of God " and the Good of Man being the two Grand " or General Commandments, all particular " Precepts muſt be comprehended under " Theſe Two.".

In the laſt way of Stating this Matter it is aſſerted, that all particular Precepts muſt be comprehended under theſe Two General ones, *viz.* To honour God, and to do Good to Man; and theſe, it is ſaid, reach to every Thing obligatory upon account of its Excellency. It had been aſſerted juſt before, that neither God nor Man can require any Thing more than the Relations we ſtand in to God and our Fellow Creatures require; and all this is ſtill farther reſolv'd into One ſingle Principle, *viz.* that of Self-good; more than this God will not require of any one.

We ſhall allow readily, that every Man is concern'd to act for the Honour of God, and the Good of Men; and that, in the laſt Reſult, theſe Rules will be found to coincide: ſo that the Moſt general Principle is This, All men ſhould act what tends ſome way or other to promote their own real Good. Let us ſee whether this general Principle will comprehend under it every thing of moral Import, ſo as to fix every ſuch Particular as a Branch of the Law of Nature.

Here

Here then I muſt recollect what hath been mention'd ſo often before, That nothing can be to us a Law, or a Branch of the Law of Nature, any farther than it is by us diſcoverable. However certain therefore Men may poſſibly be of ſome One general Point, and conſequently lie under a general Obligation ariſing from thence, yet ſtill, unleſs all the particular Concluſions, from thence deducible, are apparent, as well as the general Principle itſelf, theſe Concluſions will not be to them Parts or Branches of their Law. The general Principle may be known or knowable; and conſequently, may carry with it moral Obligation: But then, the Particulars, however really contain'd under it, or deducible from it, may to ſome Perſons not be knowable; and ſo far as this carry with them no moral Obligation. Be it, that Men are perfectly ſatisfied, they ought to purſue their own real Happineſs, The Good of their Fellow Creatures, and the Honour of God; or, (to alter the Expreſſion a little,) Be it, that they ſhould act ſuitably to their ſeveral Relations; —— do what is fit and proper; and purſue what is truly excellent: Yet notwithſtanding, unleſs we may know diſtinctly every thing which conduces to our own Happineſs, the Good of our Fellow Creatures, and the Honour of God; unleſs we can point out exactly all the ſeveral Relations in which we ſtand, and diſcern perfectly

fectly what is in Truth ſuitable to theſe Relations; Unleſs every Thing which is fit, proper, excellent, lies open to us; Theſe general Rules, however extenſive they may be in their own Nature, will not be perfectly extenſive to us; and conſequently, cannot prove, that The Law or Religion of Nature, (in the ſtrict Senſe of the Expreſſion,) takes in every Thing which is fit and proper Matter of that Law. —— As I ſhall have Occaſion to reſume this Point hereafter, in another Part of my Work, I ſhall diſmiſs it for the preſent, and haſten to the

4th Article, on which the Perfection of The Law of Nature ſhould be examin'd, *viz.* Whether This Law propoſes the beſt and moſt ſuitable Means for the Support and Improvement of Virtue; and ſuch, that nothing of greater or higher Moment can poſſibly be propos'd to us.

The Means, I have now in View, are not neceſſary in every State and Condition of Man, but founded on the preſent Circumſtances of our Nature; in which it is obſervable, and acknowledg'd by the beſt and wiſeſt Men we know of, that there is a ſtrong Tendency and Propenſion to things in themſelves wrong.

Thoſe who have conſider'd Matters with no better Light than Human Reaſon could give them, have been apt to conclude, that our Nature was not always in the ſame State

State in which we find it now; — that as it came pure out of the Hands of our Maker, our Underſtanding muſt have been clearer and more extenſive, and our Affections or Paſſions more governable. Of this, which could only be conjectur'd by natural Light, the ſacred Writings have given us a diſtinct Account; informing us, that our Nature, originally upright, hath been deprav'd and corrupted by the Tranſgreſſion of our firſt Parents.

On this we build a Diſtinction concerning the Twofold State of Man: The one, in which his Underſtanding ſerv'd him for every purpoſe to which Human Underſtanding can ſerve; The other, in which it is defective as to thoſe Points which are of the higheſt Importance to him: The One, in which Men's Paſſions were entirely regular or governable; The other, in which they are heighten'd beyond due Bounds, leading Men either to bad Ends, or to good ones in a bad and irregular way.

In conſequence of this Evil State we find, that every Man hath in Fact ſinned; — violated, in ſome reſpect or other, the Rules which his own Reaſon taught him; and conſequently, hath expos'd himſelf to the Diſpleaſure of that Being, who preſcrib'd theſe Rules. The preſent State of Man is, I ſay, This; He is a Sinner, as having broken that Law which he knew or might have

known; on which account He is liable to Puniſhments he knows not how to avoid: And, as being corrupt likewiſe, he hath not an Heart to combat the Difficulties of a future Obedience. He needs therefore Aſſurance of Pardon in the one caſe, and ſome extraordinary Aids and Aſſiſtances in the other. On any other Foot, the Cauſe of Virtue cannot be ſufficiently maintain'd; Conſequently, That Law or Religion, which cannot account for theſe Particulars, muſt fail us in a very important Concern; and therefore, cannot be eſteem'd abſolutely perfect.

I begin with obſerving, that mere Human Reaſon cannot give us full Aſſurance of Pardon for paſt Offences.

Thus much will be allow'd on all Hands, That Offences, merely as ſuch, cannot claim a Pardon. If they could, then farewel to the Sanctions of God's Laws; —— to the Doctrine of a Providence; and to the Juſtice and Wiſdom of God. On this Foot, the Cauſe of Virtue muſt loſe its main Support; and it would be indifferent in a manner, whether Men acted right or wrong. Now, if Offences, as ſuch, cannot claim a Pardon, the Offender muſt hope to eſcape Puniſhment on account of ſomething or other done in order to atone for them; and what may be done this way, deſerves Conſideration.

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The wiſer and better Part of Mankind have fix'd on theſe Two ways, *viz.* Sacrifice and Repentance. Now, if Human Reaſon cannot neceſſarily infer a Pardon on the Performance of Either, or Both of theſe; it follows, that it cannot give us any abſolute Aſſurance of Pardon at all; and conſequently, without ſome farther Light, muſt leave us in ſad Doubts and Perplexities.

As to Sacrifices, if they are conſider'd merely as preſcrib'd by Human Reaſon, and without Regard to any Divine Inſtitution, they ſeem to carry with them Nothing more than an Acknowledgement of our own Demerits. They repreſent to us indeed the Death, which we ourſelves deſerve; But, What Connexion is there between the meriting Puniſhment, and the eſcaping it?

It muſt be confeſs'd, that in another way they may ſerve Purpoſes truly excellent. By keeping up a quick Senſe of the Demerit of Sin, they ſerve to prevent it for the future; and conſequently, lay the Foundation of Obedience for the Time to come. But then, What Relation hath This to Pardon for Sins already committed? If it hath any, we muſt reſolve it into This Principle; That Repentance being a ſufficient Atonement, Sacrifices muſt conduce to the ſame End, as being conducive to Repentance. And this leads me to enquire, Whether Repentance can in

mands which are made on us for the future,) give full Aſſurance of Pardon for the paſt Violation of God's Laws.

And as it may appear from conſidering the Nature and Extent of our Obligations to God, that mere Obedience for the future, or, if you pleaſe, Repentance, cannot of itſelf enſure our Pardon; ſo are there likewiſe, Secondly, ſome Grounds for ſuſpecting, that the Supreme Being will not wholly overlook the Sinner, nor reſtore him to full Favour merely on Account of ſuch Obedience.

A wiſe Law-giver is concern'd to guard his Laws by the Execution of proper Sanctions; which to remit entirely, is, in effect, to give up the Law. If God is concern'd to give Men Laws at all, He is equally concern'd to enforce the Obſervance of them; and conſequently, to puniſh their Violation in ſome Sort or other. From hence it might ſeem, that God would not be fully reconcil'd to the Sinner merely in Conſequence of his future Obedience; but would take ſome Method or other to vindicate his Honour, and to impreſs a Senſe of the Obligations Men are under to a conſtant and never-failing Obedience.

To which may be added, Thirdly, That as Wiſdom is a Perfection in The Divine Being as well as Goodneſs, ſo Nothing can be properly an Act of Goodneſs, which is not conſiſtent with Wiſdom; and conſequently,

quently, in order to know for certain How far a future Obedience will avail for our Pardon, we muſt not only conſider what might be hop'd from The Divine Goodneſs, but likewiſe whether it be conſiſtent with a perfectly wiſe Adminiſtration to accept Repentance for this Purpoſe. Now, this we cannot, by our natural Reaſon, be entirely ſure of, unleſs we are able to ſee through the whole Scheme of Things; unleſs we are able to determine concerning every particular End which may be anſwer'd by Puniſhment; and to prove that Wiſdom is concern'd to pardon every Man upon Repentance and Amendment.

If God indeed ſhall offer Pardon; and declare that this is done in View of ſomething accepted by him as a Satisfaction, the Point will be clear. Our Hope will then become Aſſurance, and the Difficulty before-mention'd vaniſh. We ſhall then be certain Things are ſo order'd by him, as to magnify at once his Wiſdom and his Mercy. But, without ſuch a Declaration, however ſtrong our Hopes may be, they muſt ſtill have this Allay, that poſſibly we may be miſtaken: The Conſtitution of Things, to us unknown, may poſſibly not admit of abſolute Pardon; and conſequently, on ſuch a Foot, this concerning Queſtion concerning the Pardon of Sin muſt be perplex'd and doubtful.

The principal Things alledg'd by this Author in Proof that Pardon muſt neceſſarily follow Repentance, may be reduc'd under the following Heads; Firſt, That Sin being the only Ground of God's Diſpleaſure, Repentance muſt render Men the proper Objects of God's Favour; and conſequently, of itſelf entitle them to Pardon. And, Secondly, That as Repentance is the only End of Puniſhment, ſo where this End is obtain'd, Puniſhment muſt ceaſe.

The Firſt Argument is thus repreſented by our Author; "Can any Thing be more "evident, than that if doing Evil is the "only Foundation of God's Diſpleaſure, "ceaſing to do Evil, and doing the contrary, "muſt take away that Diſpleaſure? As long "as Men continue in their Sins, they muſt "continue the proper Objects of God's Re-"ſentment; but when they, forſaking their "Sins, act a Part ſuitable to their rational "Nature, they of courſe become the proper "Objects of his Approbation." *p.* 417, 418.

There is Something ſpecious enough in this Argument, which may deceive an unwary Reader. Sin, or the doing Evil, is doubtleſs the Foundation of God's Diſpleaſure, and the only Foundation of it. So far as this we agree; But then we differ widely as to the Concluſion which he draws from this Principle, *viz.* That ceaſing to do Evil, and, doing the contrary, muſt take away that Diſpleaſure,

Diſpleaſure. It is true indeed, when a Man ceaſes to do Evil, and does the contrary, his Actions muſt ſo far be approv'd by God; ſo far he is the proper Object of Approbation. His Conduct for the preſent is right; and conſequently, cannot draw on him Divine Diſpleaſure. But all this is foreign to the Point. The Queſtion, is, Not whether acting right for the preſent be approveable; but whether it be ſufficient of itſelf to remove all Diſpleaſure for having acted wrong formerly.

The Negative muſt be here maintain'd; and that upon the Principle laid down by this Gentleman, *viz.* That doing Evil is the Foundation of God's Diſpleaſure. If this be true, (as is agreed on both Hands) then the having done Evil is a like Foundation of Diſpleaſure; For a bad Action, which is cenſurable in the Act, will not ceaſe to be ſo when it is paſt.

I cannot but remark, that according to our Author's Way of Arguing, Diſpleaſure for any Sin can continue no longer than the Sin itſelf is in Act; For, ceaſing to do Evil, ſaith he, muſt take away that Diſpleaſure. He adds indeed theſe Words, "Doing the "contrary;" but it is evident that Theſe are referr'd to ſomething elſe, *viz.* The Divine Approbation attainable by Obedience. This ſurely implies ſomewhat more than bare Removal of Diſpleaſure. Now if Diſpleaſure

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for any Act of Sin muſt continue no longer than the Sin itſelf is in Act, what will become of the Divine Sanctions? On this Foot, there can be no Puniſhments, properly ſpeaking, inflicted at all: For theſe always carry with them a Retroſpect; and import an Evil inflicted on account of an Evil done. Our Author therefore hath carry'd this Matter to an extravagant Length. He attempts to prove, that Repentance muſt neceſſarily be attended with full Pardon, by an Argument, which, if it proves any thing at all, muſt prove at the ſame Time, that no Puniſhments for Sin can be at all inflicted; and conſequently, that no Sins whatſoever need any Pardon in the leaſt.

This Second Argument to the ſame Purpoſe ſets forth, That as Repentance is the End of Puniſhment, ſo where this End is obtain'd, Puniſhment muſt ceaſe. The Fourth Chapter of his Book is principally ſpent on this Point. He there aſſerts, "That as it "was for the Sake of Man, that he [*i. e.* "God] gave him Laws, ſo he executes "them purely for the ſame Reaſon. —— "That even amongſt Men none ought to "be puniſh'd, (ſince what is paſt can't be "help'd,) but to prevent a future Breach of "The Law. *p.* 38. —— That our greateſt "Felicity conſiſts in having ſuch an impartial and diſintereſted Judge, as well as Legiſlator, that whether He puniſhes or re-

"wards,

" wards, he acts alike for our Good; That " being the End of all his Laws, and conſequently, of the Penalties as well as Re- " wards which make them Laws. *p.* 40. — " That the Effects of God's Juſtice, (they " never extending to Annihilation,) muſt not " only be for the Good of others, but even " of the Perſons puniſh'd. *p.* 41. — Laſtly, " That all Puniſhment for Puniſhment " Sake is mere Cruelty and Malice; — " and conſequently, whatever Puniſhments " God inflicts muſt be a Mark of his Love." *p.* 42.

In theſe Paſſages the following Aſſertions are contain'd; That Men ought not to be puniſh'd, but to prevent a future Breach of God's Law: — That therefore all Puniſhments are for the Good of the Perſon puniſh'd; — And, that every thing beyond this is mere Cruelty and Malice. In Oppoſition to which Aſſertions I ſhall endeavour to prove, That the Reformation of the Offender is not the only End of Puniſhment; — That in many Caſes the Execution of Puniſhments may prove not at all for the Good of the Perſon puniſh'd; — And that the Execution of ſuch is no Argument of Cruelty or Malice.

Puniſhment is one of the Sanctions of God's Laws; the great End of which muſt be, To enforce Obedience to them. Its primary End therefore is, not ſo much to reform Offences, as

as to prevent them. It is threaten'd with this View only: And tho' the Execution of it may promote Ends ſomewhat different, yet ſuch ought always to be conſider'd as ſubordinate to that great one, which was clearly the original Intention. But, what if Men will not be influenc'd by theſe Threats? What if they offend even with a View to Mercy? Muſt Puniſhment therefore be ſuſpended, and The Divine Threatnings entirely vain? Certainly Laws may, and ought to be ſupported, whatever the Offender ſuffer by it; and what may reaſonably be threaten'd, may as reaſonably be executed.

Be it therefore, that Puniſhment is executed; yet ſtill the Queſtion remains, whether the Execution of it can have any other End than the Reformation of the Offender; and conſequently, whether this End being once obtain'd, Puniſhment muſt not ceaſe of courſe. To which I reply, That the Execution of Puniſhment may be intended, not merely to reform the Offender, *i. e.* to bring him out of that bad moral State in which he is at preſent, but likewiſe to prevent his relapſing into it, for the future. And if this be the Caſe, then a preſent Reformation may not be ſufficient to remove Puniſhment; which, having a farther End, muſt continue 'till that End itſelf be gain'd. Tho' after all, the Evil which Men ſuffer, when conſider'd in this View, is not ſo properly Puniſhment

as

as Diſcipline. In this manner it is conſider'd in Holy Scripture. And conſequently, Repentance is ſo far from being the only End of Puniſhment, that, ſtrictly ſpeaking, it is no End of it at all.

Yet this I will not inſiſt on at preſent. I will allow that the Reformation of Offenders may be One End of inflicting Puniſhment in certain Caſes. But will it follow from hence, that it muſt be the only End of it in all Caſes? Will this Gentleman aſſert, that The Execution of capital Puniſhment tends to the Reformation of the Offender himſelf, and is for his Good? — or, if it be not ſo, it muſt be abſolutely unlawful? On this Foot, What Civil Government can be ſupported?

But, I ſhall be told, What have we to do with Civil Puniſhments, when the Divine only are in View? Right; and I ſhould not have ſtep'd out of my Way, if the Gentleman had kept himſelf within tolerable Bounds, and had not expreſs'd himſelf in ſuch a Manner, as to ſubvert Civil Government itſelf. However, I will confine myſelf to thoſe Penalties, which are properly Divine Sanctions. Concerning which I muſt aſſert, That the Execution of them may ſerve for general Example, and to contain other Perſons beſide the Sufferer within the Bounds of Duty. The Honour and Authority of Laws are then ſupported, when the Obedience of ſome is ſecur'd by the Puniſhment of others. This will

will eaſily be allow'd to be a nobler and more extenſive End, than the mere Reformation of the Offender himſelf; and conſequently, to be more fit and proper to be purſu'd.

Suppoſe this The Caſe; Suppoſe a Man is puniſh'd for a Terror to others: Is this Puniſhment then for the Offender's Good? why, Yes, perhaps our Gentleman will reply; Both Ends, to wit, the private Good of the Offender, and the publick Good of Mankind may be purſu'd at once. Admitting this likewiſe; yet muſt The Puniſhment ceaſe as ſoon as One End, *viz.* The Offender's own Good is obtain'd? And muſt no farther Regard be had to that more extenſive End, the Terror of others? And if Regard muſt likewiſe be had to This, muſt not the Puniſhment continue 'till this End likewiſe be ſufficiently obtained? The Conſequence is plain; a Man may, conſiſtently with the juſt Rules of Government, be puniſh'd beyond what is neceſſary for his own mere Amendment; and therefore, may ſuffer Puniſhments, which are not for his own Good at all.

But our Author ſtill goes on, and ſays, This is mere Cruelty and Malice. All Puniſhment for Puniſhment Sake muſt be ſo: And what he means by this is explain'd juſt after, when he infers from hence, "Whatever Puniſhment God inflicts, muſt be a "Mark of his Love." —— Of his Love: —— To whom? To the Offender; for ſo it follows,

follows, —— " in not ſuffering his Creatures " to remain in that miſerable State, which " is inſeperable from Sin and Wickedneſs, *p.* 42.

To inflict Puniſhments which are not mere Marks of Love to the Offender, is, ſays he, mere Cruelty and Malice. If this be the Caſe, then all Puniſhment, conſider'd as ſuch, muſt be Cruelty; For, conſider'd in this View, it hath reſpect only to a Sin committed; of which it is the proper Effect and Conſequence.

Put the Caſe, that in the firſt Appointment of Things God had order'd, That a certain Courſe, in itſelf fit and proper, ſhould be follow'd by certain Advantages, and the contrary by proportionable Sufferings, over and above what ſhould neceſſarily ariſe from natural Conſtitution: Suppoſe likewiſe that he had given Men Intimations of this: On this Foot, Men would have their Choice; Life or Death, Happineſs or Miſery would be ſet before them: Let us now ſuppoſe, that Man obſtinately purſues what he knows will be attended with Miſery; Is it Cruelty to let him have his Choice?

If this be affirm'd, let us ſee how Matters will ſtand in Affairs relating to the natural Order of Things. Temperance and Sobriety ſtrengthen the Conſtitution, and promote Health: On the other Hand, Intemperance impairs both; and Things may be carry'd ſo

ſo far, that no After-wiſdom, no Repentance and Amendment ſhall be able to repair the Loſs. Is this Conſtitution wrong? or, is God, in ſuch a Caſe, concern'd to break thro' the ſettled Courſe, and to remove the Evils a Man hath fooliſhly brought on himſelf? Theſe Things cannot be affirm'd. What Wiſdom hath ordain'd, it is the Concern of Wiſdom to ſupport. Goodneſs and Mercy are here entirely out of the Queſtion; which (as I noted before) cannot require any thing inconſiſtent with Wiſdom.

In this I am ſupported by a remarkable Aſſertion of our Author himſelf: "Theſe "[*i. e.* Juſtice and Mercy] oblige not God "either to puniſh or to pardon any farther "than his infinite Wiſdom ſees fit." *p.* 41. The Queſtion therefore, on this Foot, will be, whether Wiſdom requires, that no Offender ſhould be puniſh'd but for his own Good; or rather, whether it doth not much more require he ſhould be puniſh'd for the Terror of others: The Queſtion, I ſay, is, Whether the Nature of Government, and conſequently the Wiſdom of its Adminiſtration, doth not require this: And if it doth, then Puniſhment may be inflicted with a View to publick Service; And to do ſo, is not to act with Cruelty but Wiſdom; In ſhort, 'tis to act in a Way, which the Offender muſt approve, at the ſame Time he ſuffers.

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A Gentleman indeed, ſuppos'd to be the ſame with the Author I am now dealing with, in his *Second Addreſs to the Inhabitants of* London *and* Weſtminſter, endeavours to carry the Matter ſomewhat farther; aſſerting, "That the Wiſdom of God will "oblige him to forgive the Penitent." This is ſomething: But then, How does he make it good? Why, thus; "He then becomes "what God in his Wiſdom requires him to "be; and it would be Cruelty and Rage, "not Wiſdom and Juſtice, to afflict him un-"neceſſarily." To which he adds, "Pu-"niſhment hath never a Retroſpect, (for "what is paſt cannot be helped); but is de-"ſign'd only to prevent the like for the "future." p. 7.

By Repentance, *i. e.* a preſent State of Obedience after Tranſgreſſion, Man is what God's Wiſdom requires he ſhould be now; and therefore, to be ſure, no Puniſhments can be laid on him upon That Account: Such would be inconſiſtent with Juſtice and Wiſdom. But will a preſent Obedience prove that he hath always obey'd? And may not a Man be liable to ſuffer, as well for a paſt as a preſent Diſobedience? Why, No, ſays he; what is paſt cannot be help'd. This is true indeed; But if this be an Objection againſt puniſhing paſt Tranſgreſſions, it equally holds againſt all Puniſhment whatſoever: For no Tranſgreſſions can be puniſh'd 'till

given us. The later Point will be readily granted by our Adverſaries; and therefore we have Nothing to do but to evince the former.

Now, I ſhall deſire nothing to be allow'd me here, but what is plain and known Matter of Fact; Nothing but what muſt be granted by every Man, who will conſider either what happens abroad, or paſſes within his own Mind at home. That there are a great Number of Temptations to turn aſide from the Rules of Righteouſneſs; That there is a ſtrange Proneneſs in the Temper and Diſpoſition of Mankind, to comply with theſe Temptations; That there are Affections and Paſſions, which 'tis difficult to keep within due Bounds; That however various theſe may be in different Men, yet every one is in ſome Particular or other liable to be govern'd by them; That Education, Cuſtom, Way of Life, and the like, do ſtrengthen and confirm theſe Diſpoſitions; and as They render immoral Acts agreeable for the preſent, muſt throw great Difficulties in the Ways of Obedience: All this, I ſay, muſt be allow'd me. Upon this Foot I argue, That without Something more than mere Philoſophy can ſuggeſt to us, we cannot expect any great Matters to be perform'd. For, however it may be ſuppos'd, that human Wiſdom would be ſufficient, were Men in an equal Poiſe between Virtue and Vice; yet

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what can This do, when Men are influenc'd by ſuch Deſires, as they know not how to contradict? In ſuch a Caſe, Reaſon and the Senſe of Duty, if they cannot influence Men, will but aggravate their Misfortune; ſince they muſt reproach them for having done what they had not Reſolution enough to forbear.

The Gentleman I am arguing againſt, frequently tells us of the Frailty and Imperfection of Man. What is this but a Confeſſion of the Point I am contending for? If Men are really ſo exceeding frail, and unapt either to attend to Duty, or to proſecute it with Reſolution; what great Matters can be expected? In this State of Things ſomewhat muſt be done, either to deſtroy Temptations, or to enable Men to conquer them. If therefore The Supreme Being ſhall, in great Compaſſion, encourage us by the Promiſe of his own Aſſiſtance; if every Perſon, who is ſincerely willing to attempt his Recovery, ſhall have Aſſurance that his Attempts will not be vain, —— then a Foundation will be laid for proſecuting this Point with Vigour: In ſuch a Caſe no Difficulties will be ſufficient to diſcourage Men; For they may conſider that God's *Strength will be made perfect in Weakneſs.* 2 Cor. xii. 9.

The Concluſion from hence is manifeſt; Foraſmuch as the State of Things is ſuch, that ſomething more is expedient as a Means

of Virtue, than mere Human Reaſon can furniſh us withal; and foraſmuch as the Law or Religion of Nature can reach no farther than Human Reaſon can carry us, This Law or Religion muſt ſo far fail; and therefore is not, as This Author contends, abſolutely perfect.

Before I quit this Subject, it will be proper to examine what this Gentleman hath advanc'd on the other Side. His Arguments are looſely ſcatter'd in ſeveral Parts of his Book: But the whole Amount of them may be reduc'd to theſe Three Points;

1. The Law of Nature proceeds from God, who is abſolutely wiſe and perfect.

2. It is the Rule whereby we muſt judge concerning the Perfection of every other Law.

3. It is that Law whereby the moſt perfect Being directs and governs his own Actions.

1. The Law of Nature muſt be an abſolutely perfect Law, becauſe it proceeds from God, who is infinitely Wiſe and Perfect. Thus, p. 3. "*A.* If God from the Beginning "gave Man a Religion, I ask, Was that "Religion perfect, or imperfect? *B.* Moſt "perfect, no doubt; ſince no Religion can "come from a Being of infinite Wiſdom and "Perfection, but what is abſolutely perfect." The ſame Way of Reaſoning occurs again, p. 8, 20, 60, 283, beſides ſeveral other Places.

Places. Our Author, we ſee, lays no ſmall Streſs on it. But whether it really deſerves ſuch Regard, ſhall be conſider'd immediately.

The Law of Nature is, without Doubt, The Law of God; and without ſuppoſing it to be ſo, we ſhall be unable to prove it ſtrictly obligatory, *i. e.* To be properly ſpeaking any Law at all.

We admit, in the next Place, That God cannot preſcribe imperfectly. If He gives us Laws, theſe muſt be perfect, or ſuited to the Ends for which they were given. The Law of Nature therefore is perfect in its Kind; and will anſwer thoſe Purpoſes, which a Law of That Kind can anſwer. But it will not follow from hence, that it is abſolutely perfect, and incapable of any Addition whatſoever. Every Species of Creatures is perfect; —— perfect, I mean, in its Kind; But who will aſſert, that any One Species is abſolutely perfect, and incapable of receiving any farther Degrees of Excellence? The ſame which I have obſerv'd concerning the Creatures of God's Power, will equally hold as to the Preſcriptions of his Will. They are both perfect in their Kind: But as the One, when compar'd with more noble Creatures, may be ſaid to be relatively imperfect, ſo may the other likewiſe, when compar'd with more excellent Diſpenſations.

I have obſerv'd before, that The Law of Nature cannot be more perfect than our Reaſon itſelf is; becauſe it cannot reach farther than our Reaſon itſelf can carry us. Had God therefore created us with lower Degrees of Reaſon than what we now enjoy, our Nature would ſtill have been in its Kind perfect; and the Law, which our Reaſon muſt, in ſuch a Caſe, have taught us, would, in this Senſe, have been perfect likewiſe. But would it have been as perfect, or ſo extenſive as it is at preſent? No certainly: Several Things fitting and proper, and which are now plain and evident, would then have eſcap'd our Notice. Should God add to us any new Faculties, new Meaſures of Duty would ariſe; Our Obligations would be different; and The Law of Nature enlarg'd: Additions would, in ſuch a Caſe, be made to it. And if this be true, then The Law of Nature, as it now ſubſiſts, neither is, nor can be, abſolutely perfect.

Nor doth this at all derogate from the Wiſdom and Perfection of The Supreme Being, the Author of this Law. For the Defects of it ariſe, not from the Nature of God, but of the Creature. This Law hath a Power of obliging, *i. e.* it is properly a Law, juſt ſo far as Men do or may ſee the Reaſons and Fitneſſes of Things. It fails therefore on this Account only, becauſe Men themſelves are deficient and imperfect.

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In the original State of Purity and Excellence, in which Man was at firſt created, I queſtion not but it reach'd to every thing morally fit for Man, in theſe Circumſtances to do. But, when our Nature became corrupt, the Underſtanding being darken'd, and the Will perverted, *i. e.* when Men had ſunk beneath themſelves, then this Law itſelf ſuffer'd likewiſe. From that Time forward, The Law of Nature, and The Rule of Fitneſs were no longer commenſurate to each other; and the former fell ſhort of the later, in Proportion as human Capacities chanc'd to be impair'd.

If it be ſaid, That God was concern'd to preſerve his own Laws in their original Extent, by preventing ſuch Corruptions in human Nature as ſhould be prejudicial to them; —— This is rather a bold Preſumption what God ought to have done, than a proving what He actually hath done. And beſides, if any Allowance ſhould be made to the Argument, it may be turn'd, I conceive, to our Advantage; as ſhewing, How fit and proper it was for The Supreme Being to aid the Imperfections of our Reaſon; and to reſtore and reinforce that Law, by a ſpecial Revelation, which was in a great Degree loſt thro' Ignorance and Error.

2. The Second Argument is This; The Law of Nature is the Rule by which we muſt judge concerning the Perfection of every other Law;

Law; and conſequently muſt be abſolutely perfect itſelf. His Words are Theſe; "If "This Law [*i. e.* The Law of Nature] is "the Teſt of the Perfection of any written "Law, muſt not that be the moſt perfect "Law, by which the Perfection of all others "is to be try'd?" p. 199.

If the Gentleman, by Law of Nature in this Place, means, that Syſtem of moral Principles and Precepts, which is by us diſcoverable in the Uſe of Reaſon, we ſhall eaſily ſee the Fallacy of his Argument; And if he intends any thing elſe, there is a manifeſt Inconſiſtency in his Method of Proceeding. This Law, ſays he, is the Teſt of the Perfection of any written Law: But, To whom is it ſuch a Teſt? —— To Men certainly. Now if this be true, then it is evident, he muſt intend, by Law of Nature, juſt ſo much as the Perſon, who uſes this Teſt, is Maſter of: For no Man can examine the Truth of a Propoſition by any Principles, to which he is an entire Stranger. The Queſtion therefore, is This; Whether this Law, as being the ſuppos'd Teſt of every other Law, be, for that Reaſon, abſolutely perfect? I conceive, Not; and this will appear from conſidering How far, and in What Senſe, other Laws are to be try'd by it.

Thus much is evident, that as nothing can poſſibly be true, which is really inconſiſtent with a ſelf-evident or demonſtrated Truth,

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ſo nothing can poſſibly be the Will of God by Revelation, which is contradictory to the Will of the ſame God manifeſted by Reaſon. What is evidently requir'd, from conſidering the Natures of Things, cannot poſſibly be forbidden by Revelation; and ſo, what is manifeſtly forbidden in the former way, cannot poſſibly be requir'd in the later. The Province of Reaſon is, in this Caſe, to judge, not whether an acknowledg'd Law is to be receiv'd or rejected, but whether ſomething propos'd to us as a Divine Law, be really ſuch or no. And even here we judge by our Reaſon, not *abſolutely* whether it ought to be rejected or not, but only juſt ſo far, as the Teſt whereby we try it, reaches. For, when we are got beyond this, we are unable to prove any thing either way; and therefore, ſince Nothing can be ſufficiently prov'd from the Nature of the Thing, as far as it appears to us, we call for Proof from external Evidence. It is plain then, that our Law of Nature, or the moral Principles and Precepts which our Reaſon teaches, however it may be admitted as a Teſt, yet is not any abſolute Teſt, whereby every Law propos'd muſt be try'd. And if it be a Teſt only in a limitted Senſe, then we cannot infer its abſolute Perfection from the preſent Argument.

Put the Caſe, that Men have no other Rule or Teſt to judge by: This hath been, and ſtill is the Caſe in many Parts of the World.

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In ſuch Circumſtances they are concern'd, no doubt, to make the beſt Uſe of it they can; and ſhall accordingly be acquitted or condemn'd by God, as they adhere to, or deviate from this Rule. But will it follow from hence, that becauſe this is the beſt, indeed the only Rule they have, it is therefore abſolutely perfect? By no means: And for the ſame Reaſon, our Author would maintain the abſolute Perfection of this Law, *viz.* That it is the only Teſt ſuch Men have of moral and religious Matters; we may aſſert likewiſe, that the Senſes of Brutes are abſolutely perfect; For theſe likewiſe are Their only Teſt of outward and ſenſible Objects.

3. Our Author endeavours to evince the ſame Point by a Third Argument, *viz.* This is The Law by which God directs his own Actions; and conſequently it muſt be abſolutely perfect. "I am ſurpriz'd, ſays he, "to find The Doctor, [*i. e.* Dr. *Clark*] ar-"guing as tho' that Law, which is a moſt "perfect Rule to the moſt perfect Being, is "not perfect enough for his imperfect Crea-"tures; tho' their whole Perfection conſiſts in "imitating him, and governing their Actions "by the ſame Rule." p. 398. Two Things are here affirm'd; 1. That The Law of Nature is the moſt perfect Rule to the moſt perfect Being. And, 2. That our whole Perfection conſiſts in imitating God, and governing our Actions by the ſame Rule.

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Since this Gentleman affirms, that the Law of Nature is the moſt perfect Rule to the moſt perfect Being, I muſt remind him of his own Definition of the Term, with which he ſet out in his Second Chapter. There he declares expreſly, "By Natural "Religion I underſtand the Belief of a "God, and the Senſe and Practice of thoſe "Duties which reſult from the Knowledge "we, *by our Reaſon*, have of him and his "Perfections, *&c.*" Now is This really the moſt perfect Rule to the moſt perfect Being? Is human Knowledge the Meaſure of the Divine? And are theſe Rules, even the moſt compleat Collection of them we are able to frame; Are theſe, I ſay, the exact and adequate Meaſures of The Divine Conduct? If not, Why does this Gentleman change the State of the Queſtion? and when he is debating concerning the Perfection of that Law of Nature, which human Knowledge is capable of diſcovering, Why does he tells us, that the Rule by which God directs his own Actions is abſolutely perfect? This is arguing entirely beſide the Purpoſe; and may ſerve as well to prove any other Propoſition as This.

The Rule of God's Actions is indeed an abſolutely perfect Rule. But our Law of Nature may, and certainly does, fall vaſtly ſhort of it. The former is the Rule which a perfectly wiſe Being ſets himſelf. The later

later is the Rule, which weak and imperfect Creatures are able to diſcover: And therefore theſe muſt differ as much from each other as Infinite from Finite; or Divine Wiſdom from Human Ignorance.

Nor is the Second Poſition in this Argument true, *viz.* That our whole Perfection conſiſts in imitating God, and governing our Actions by the ſame Rule by which He governs his. It is true indeed, there are ſeveral general Rules common to The Supreme Being and his intelligent Creatures; ſuch as are the Rules of Juſtice, Goodneſs, and the like. But even here, many Things may be Inſtances of Juſtice or Goodneſs in the One, which will not be ſo in the Other; And God hath a Right to do, what Man can have no Right to imitate.

The Reaſon of this is clear. The State and Condition of The Supreme Being is infinitely different from ours; and Therefore what is fit and proper for him, may be unfit and improper for us. A Magiſtrate may take away a Life, not only with Innocence, but Praiſe; which to do, in a private Subject, would be Murther. We muſt conclude therefore, that human Perfection cannot conſiſt in imitating God ſimply, but only ſo far as our Condition will make His Actions imitable by us.

And if our Perfection doth not conſiſt in imitating God ſimply, much leſs can it be affirm'd

affirm'd that our whole Perfection conſiſts in it. If this were the Caſe, What would become of Obedience to God? For I cannot conceive but the moral Perfection of the Creature, muſt imply an abſolute Subjection to the Creator: What again, would become of Patience, Temperance, Sobriety? Virtues ſurely which carry with them ſome Perfection in Beings compounded of an animal, as well as a rational Part. Theſe are Perfections proper to us: Things in which we cannot poſſibly imitate God; and therefore our whole Perfection cannot poſſibly conſiſt in an Imitation of him.

In ſhort; The Rule of Fitneſs with regard to God is One Thing; and the Rule of Fitneſs with regard to Creatures is another. The Rule of the Divine Actions is, no doubt, an abſolutely perfect Rule; But this, I have obſerv'd, in many Inſtances, cannot reach to us at all. And with regard to us, we ought always to diſtinguiſh between a Rule of Fitneſs, and a Law of Duty. The Fitneſs of Things will be to us a Law, juſt ſo far as we are capable of knowing it, and no farther. And when we are treating concerning the Law of Nature, as we ought to underſtand by it what is to us properly a Law, ſo it is evident, the Perfection of this Law muſt reach juſt ſo far as the Perfection of our rational Faculties reaches; which, if they come ſhort of

of abſolute Perfection, the Rule or Law diſcover'd by them muſt do ſo likewiſe. Any other abſolutely perfect Law of Nature is, with regard to us, an imaginary Thing; and ſubſiſts no where, but in the Mind of Him who is abſolutely perfect.

CHAP.

CHAP. III.

Whether The Law or Religion of Nature be immutable, in ſuch a Senſe eſpecially, as to be incapable of admitting any additional Precepts.

FROM the abſolute Perfection of The Law or Religion of Nature, our Author proceeds to infer, that it muſt be incapable of any Kind of Alteration, incapable of Addition or Diminution, and as immutable as The Author of it: "Can Revelation therefore, ſays he, add any "Thing to a Religion abſolutely perfect, uni-"verſal, and immutable?" p. 3, 4. We ſee in theſe Words his Application of the Principle before examin'd. If the Religion of Nature be abſolutely perfect, it muſt be immutable; it can admit of no Addition or Diminution; and conſequently, God cannot require any thing by Revelation, which was

not antecedently requir'd by The Law of Nature.

But, what if this Law be not abſolutely perfect? Then, I hope, it may be capable of ſome Additions; and certain Things may become Duties by Revelation, which were not ſo before.

This Point concerning the Immutability of the Law of Nature, may be neceſſary to be ſtated clearly; not only becauſe our Author builds much upon it, but likewiſe, becauſe the groſs Denial of a Doctrine, generally allow'd, may perhaps give Cauſe of Offence to ſerious and good Men. And yet, ſince I have explain'd myſelf ſo diſtinctly in my firſt Chapter, and ſhewn, that by Law of Nature nothing more ſhould be underſtood, than ſuch a Collection of moral Principles and Precepts, as human Reaſon teaches; after this, I ſay, it may be hoped, that no Difficulties will ariſe on this Head. For, if the Extent of this Law muſt be meaſur'd by Human Reaſon, the Law itſelf cannot be more immutable than Human Reaſon itſelf is: It muſt vary as Human Reaſon itſelf does; and be capable of the very ſame Additions or Diminutions.

There are indeed Two Senſes in which the Expreſſion is ſometimes uſed. It either ſignifies a perfect Collection of all thoſe moral Principles and Precepts which have a Foundation in the Nature and Reaſon of Things; or elſe, ſuch a one as we are capable of making

ing in the Uſe of Reaſon. In the later Senſe it is plainly mutable; and of this every one muſt be conſcious, who conſiders that his Duty is daily enlarg'd, as he makes greater Improvements in moral Science. And, as to the former, tho' it be not properly to us a Law, yet if it were ſo, I queſtion whether it would be found immutable, as contended for by this Author.

The Law, in this View, takes in every Thing which is morally fit to be done; yet ſtill it cannot be more immutable than thoſe Fitneſſes are on which it is founded; nor theſe Fitneſſes, than the Relations in which Men ſtand to other Beings; nor theſe Relations, than the Beings are which are thus related. Any conſiderable Change here may affect the whole in ſome Degree; may produce new Relations, new Fitneſſes; and, upon that Account, become the Ground of new Duties. If one Relation be deſtroy'd, the Law which before ſubſiſted, will ſuffer Diminution; and if a new Relation ariſes, it muſt admit Addition.

I know it is frequently maintain'd by very learned Writers, that The Law of Nature is immutable; And the Aſſertion, when rightly underſtood, is true. What is fit and right, muſt be agreeable to the Will of God: And what He, upon that Account, wills at one Time, He muſt will for ever, The State and Condition of Things ſtill continuing in every

reſpect the ſame. Virtue and Vice are not merely arbitrary Things. What is morally fit and proper, is virtuous; what is morally unfit and improper, vicious: And the ſame Wiſe and Good Being, who conſtituted Nature in ſuch a manner, that this Fitneſs or Unfitneſs ſhould immediately reſult from it, muſt intend that every Intelligent Being, as far as he is capable of diſcerning theſe Things, ſhould act agreeably. Had Men exiſted in any other Part of infinite Duration, under the ſame Circumſtances as They do at preſent, as the ſame Actions would have been fit or unfit, ſo the ſame Precepts muſt have conſtituted their Rule or Law. And ſhould human Kind continue to exiſt, as they do now, in any ſuppoſable Portions of Futurity, the ſame Rules muſt ſtill continue; and The Supreme Being muſt exact a Conformity to them, as far as Men ſhall be capable of knowing them. In this Senſe, and this only, can it be maintain'd, that The Law of Nature is eternal and unchangeable. It is eternal and unchangeable upon Suppoſition that Things always were, and always will be, in the ſame State and Condition, and no otherwiſe; For, if any conſiderable Changes happen in theſe, a proportionable Change muſt likewiſe follow in the Rule of Fitneſs, and, conſequently, in the Law of Nature.

It is frequently ſuppos'd by This Writer, that the Condition of human Nature, as far as Morality

Morality is concern'd, hath always been, and ever muſt continue as it is at preſent: I ſhall therefore aſſign Three very remarkable States, with the conſequent Alterations from the one to the other; and point out ſome of the more obvious Changes in the Rule of Conduct which muſt reſult from thence.

And, Firſt, it is very certain that Man came originally from the Hands of God pure and innocent; with ſuch a Sufficiency of intellectual Powers, and ſuch a Ballance of the Affections and Paſſions, as might anſwer the original Purpoſe of his Creation. That ſuch a State there once was, cannot be diſputed by this Author, who contends that this is ſtill the Condition of our Nature. In ſuch a State, as Man's intellectual Abilities muſt be ſuppos'd to reach to every thing by which he might anſwer the End of his Being, ſo his Law of Nature or Scheme of Duty muſt be equally extenſive. And as his Affections and Paſſions were nicely ballanc'd, ſo no Abatements could be pleaded for the leaſt Deviation from this Rule. Such a Perfection of his Condition, muſt require a like Perfection in his Obedience. Still, as Man was free, and his Perfections, however great, yet were not abſolute or unlimited, it was poſſible he might one Time or other tranſgreſs; which, if it ſhould prove the Caſe, we are concern'd to ſearch the Conſequence.

The firſt Thing which muſt follow, is, He muſt be obnoxious to Puniſhment. In the next Place, His Tranſgreſſion may be of ſuch a Kind, as to diminiſh both his intellectual and moral Abilities; To cloud his Reaſon; To diſſipate his Thoughts; and to inflame his Paſſions: So that he ſhall not only be fill'd with Anxiety for what is paſt, and Fears of what is to come, but likewiſe find the Return to Duty difficult and painful. It may happen, Laſtly, That his very Frame and Conſtitution ſhall be diſorder'd to ſuch a Degree, as to be propagated in the very ſame manner to Poſterity; From whence it may follow, That Human Nature, which was at firſt pure, ſhall become corrupted; and Man neither capable of diſcovering every thing fit and proper to be done, nor yet diſpos'd to practiſe uniformly what is known.

This leads me to conſider a Second State of Human Nature; which is by no means imaginary, but the real Condition in which it ſubſiſts at preſent. This then is a State of Corruption: And as every Man hath, in Conſequence of this, gone off from the known Rules of Duty, it is likewiſe a State of Guilt. Upon account of his Corruption, (that Part of it, I mean, which relates to the Defects of his Underſtanding) the proper Rules of Conduct will be leſs open to him, and ſo far as this, his very Law itſelf will be impair'd: But then in another Reſpect a new Duty muſt ariſe;

ariſe; As He is a Sinner, Repentance is neceſſary, which was impoſſible in a State of Innocence. Under Repentance I do here comprehend, Sorrow for Sin, Supplication for Pardon, and Reſolution of Amendment; all which, as they do neceſſarily ariſe from our preſent Circumſtances, ſo muſt they likewiſe require every other Particular, which may ſerve to promote and finiſh our Repentance. Who does not ſee, that, in this View of Things, the Rule of human Conduct muſt be ſomewhat different from what it would have been, had Men continued in their original Perfection, and maintain'd their Innocence inviolate?

Let us ſuppoſe then, upon Mens ſincere Endeavours to diſcharge their Duty, that God ſhall accept them, pardon their Tranſgreſſions, and receive them to Favour: In a Word, after removing them into another World, ſhall beſtow on them thoſe Rewards, which were originally intended them. This will bring on a Third State, by Divines term'd a State of Glory. In this, however it ſhould be ſuppos'd, that the Relation between God and Man, as Creator and Creature, and between all other intelligent Beings as Fellow Creatures, ſtill ſubſiſting, the Rule of Conduct muſt ſo far be invariably the ſame; yet other Relations being alter'd, the Reſult of them muſt vary likewiſe. Tho', as St. *Paul* tells us, *Charity never faileth*, (1 *Cor.* xiii. 8.) yet Faith

and Hope, as Inſtruments only for the Attainment of Perfection in the preſent Life, muſt ceaſe hereafter. When the Ties of Civil Society ſhall be diſſolv'd, all the Duties ariſing from them muſt fail of courſe; ſeveral new Engagements, founded on the then State of Things, muſt ſucceed, of which we have no diſtinct Conceptions now: And whether Men may not advance infinitely in Degrees of Perfection, be always acquiring new Relations, and ſtill enlarging their Duties to all Eternity, is a Point, which as it cannot be certainly evinc'd on the one hand, ſo neither can it be clearly diſprov'd on the other.

Yet be this Matter as it will: Suppoſing The Law of Nature to be as immutable as this Author contends; all that can follow from it is, That The Law of Nature, as ſuch, will be incapable of Addition or Diminution; *i. e.* nothing which was once a Part of this Law, will ever ceaſe to be ſo; and nothing can ever in Time become a Part of this Law, which was not ſuch always. If all this were allow'd the Gentleman, I cannot ſee what Advantage he can make of it. For, can any Concluſions be drawn from hence to prove, that no other Law can poſſibly be given us? Will it follow, that God cannot command any thing elſe; cannot exerciſe our Obedience by any one Particular, which Reaſon doth not ſhew to have been our Duty always?

This

This indeed is ſtrenuouſly contended for by our Author, who hath ſpent no ſmall Part of his Book on this very Point. "The Que-"ſtion, ſays he, is, Whether God, who for "many Ages did not command or forbid any "Thing but what was moral or immoral; "nor yet does ſo to the greateſt Part of Man-"kind, has, in ſome Places, and ſome Caſes, "broke into the Rule of his own Conduct, "and iſſu'd out certain Commands which "have no Foundation in Reaſon, by oblig-"ing Men to obſerve ſuch Things as would "not oblige, were they not impos'd; or, if "the Impoſition was taken off, would imme-"diately return to their primitive Indiffe-"rence? — To ſuppoſe then ſuch Com-"mands, is it not to ſuppoſe God acts arbi-"trarily, and commands for commanding "Sake? Can ſuch Commands be the Effect "of infinite Wiſdom and Goodneſs?" p. 116. Here then he aſſerts, that ſuch Commands cannot be given us, becauſe they cannot proceed from infinite Wiſdom and Goodneſs. Not content with this, he advances a Step farther; and maintains, it would be Tyranny in God to require any Thing of a poſitive Nature. "Can ſo kind and tender a Parent as "God play The Tyrant, and impoſe Com-"mands on us, which do not flow from the "Relations we ſtand in to him and one an-"other?" p. 30. And as tho' he had not yet carry'd the Matter high enough, in another Place

Place he tells us, that in giving Precepts, God muſt deal with us, juſt as one Man does by another; *i. e.* not by dictating and preſcribing to him without aſſigning the Reaſon of the Precept, but "only by propoſing Ar-"guments to convince his Underſtanding and "influence his Will; —— For, to go beyond "this, would be making Impreſſions on Man "as a Seal does on Wax, to the confounding "his Reaſon and Liberty in chuſing." p. 199.

As this is a favourite Point with our Author, and of conſiderable Moment in the preſent Debate, I ſhall conſider it diſtinctly; and, to make the Matter clearer, ſhall,

1. State the Queſtion; —— In the next Place propoſe ſuch Arguments as ſeem proper to determine it; —— and then examine the principal Objections alledg'd by our Author.

The Queſtion itſelf is ſet forth to us under different Terms, as it occurs in different Parts of this Author's Performance. Sometimes he demands, "Whether God can give us "Precepts not founded in Reaſon? —— Some-times —— "Precepts concerning Things "which would not oblige unleſs they were "impos'd; —— Sometimes —— "Precepts "concerning Things indifferent; —— And ſometimes again —— "Precepts poſitive." I take it his Doctrine is moſt fully repreſented under this laſt Expreſſion; and therefore I ſhall

ſhall chuſe to propoſe the Queſtion Thus, Whether *poſitive* Precepts can proceed from God?

My Firſt Remark, in order to ſtate The Queſtion, ſhall be this; The Term Poſitive may be underſtood either in a *relative*, or elſe in an *abſolute* Senſe.

Poſitive Precepts, in the former Senſe, are thoſe, which however founded in the real Natures and Reaſons of Things, yet to Perſons unacquainted with their proper Grounds, muſt appear to be founded in the mere Will and Authority of the Impoſer. Theſe, whatever they may be in themſelves, are to them poſitive; and thoſe who obſerve them, muſt act entirely on the Authority of the Preſcriber.

By poſitive, in the later Senſe, I mean thoſe Precepts, which are not founded in the Reaſons of Things; Matters which we are concern'd about, not in virtue of any Principles antecedent to the Command, but purely in Conſequence of the Command itſelf; and therefore, as they owe all their Force to expreſs Command, ſo when that ceaſes, all Concern of ours about them muſt ceaſe likewiſe.

I muſt obſerve, in the next Place, with reference to this later Senſe of the Term Poſitive, that it excludes either thoſe Reaſons only which are of a *moral* Kind, or thoſe likewiſe which are *natural*. By the one I would be underſtood to mean That Fitneſs or Unfitneſs of Things, upon account of which

we

we term Actions virtuous or vicious; By the other, thoſe temporal Advantages or Diſadvantages, Conveniences or Inconveniences, which ariſe from certain Actions. Theſe, tho' in Fact they more frequently determine Men than moral Reaſons are found to do, yet are in Truth of an inferior Kind; And he who foregoes an Advantage, or incurs a Diſadvantage, hath a very different Senſe of it; on the Reflection, from what That Perſon feels, who performs a worthy Action, or is guilty of a baſe one. The one may be the Rule of private Prudence or of Civil Policy; The other, as manifeſting a Divine Command, is the Ground of ſtrict and proper Duty.

Over and above what hath hitherto been noted, we ſhould obſerve beſides, that a Diſtinction may be made between Means and Ends, and this principally with reference to moral Reaſons. By moral Ends, I underſtand thoſe Actions, which being immediately ſuited to the Relations in which we ſtand, have no reference to any other Actions of a moral Kind; and by Means, thoſe which only conduce to promote and forward what I have above call'd moral Ends; which, as they are more nearly or more remotely connected with them, muſt be eſteem'd of greater or leſs Importance.

Of theſe likewiſe there are ſome, which on proper Occaſions, do naturally conduce to the

the Practice of Virtue. I would inſtance in Self-denyal: This ſerves to give us a more entire Command over ourſelves, and enables us the better to keep within proper Bounds. Others conduce to this End, not thro' any natural Efficacy, but merely in Conſequence of Inſtitution and Appointment. Thus, that reverent Poſture, which is uſed in Prayer, ſerves to promote Devotion; not indeed by any neceſſary Connexion with the Duty, but purely as ſuch a Poſture is appointed to expreſs Humility.

Thoſe Means which naturally conduce to moral Ends, are, proportionably as they conduce to them, of moral Conſideration; and as the Ends at which they are aim'd ought to be choſen by us, ſo thoſe Means ſhould likewiſe be choſen, as naturally conducive to thoſe Ends. But the Caſe is ſomewhat different in reference to inſtituted Means. Theſe, as having no neceſſary Connexion with the Practice of Virtue, are ſtrictly Poſitive. Other Means might poſſibly have been appointed equally ſerviceable to their Ends; and conſequently other Means may be preſcrib'd to us, equally conſiſtent with Fitneſs and the Reaſon of Things.

Theſe Remarks having been offer'd, in order to ſtate this Point more clearly, I ſhall paſs on to ſhew what I think myſelf concern'd to maintain.

I do

I do aſſert therefore, in the firſt Place, That God may give us Poſitive Commands, in the relative Senſe of that Expreſſion; or, That he may require us to perform or abſtain from certain Actions, without aſſigning the proper Grounds and Reaſons of the Command. Such, for Inſtance, The Precept given to our firſt Parents, in reference to the Tree of Good and Evil, ſeems to be. I ſhall not preſume to determine Whether there might not be ſome poiſonous Quality in the Fruit which occaſion'd the Command: Perhaps there might: But yet, in the Injunction given to our firſt Parents, nothing of this appears; and therefore, their Obſervance of it muſt have been reſolv'd rather into the abſolute Authority of the Commander, than any appearing Reaſon of the Command.

I do aſſert, in the next Place, that God may give Men Precepts not founded in the moral Reaſons of Things; Precepts relating to Matters which are not to be conſider'd as moral Ends, or as moral neceſſary Means; and, the Matter of which is not originally fit, nor immediately connected with Things which are ſo. And yet I muſt maintain, that even in ſuch Caſes as theſe the Precepts given may not be without a Reaſon. The Point requir'd may have a reference to ſome moral End; and contribute to it, tho' not from the Reaſon and Nature of Things, yet in virtue of poſitive Appointment. This probably was

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the Ground of ſeveral Inſtitutions in the Jewiſh Law. They were impos'd as Signs and Tokens; and having once receiv'd a Signification this way, the Uſe of them did properly ſuggeſt the Things ſignify'd.

Beyond this I muſt obſerve farther, that Precepts which are not founded on moral Reaſons, nor have any reference to Matters of that Nature, may yet be built on Reaſons of Convenience; may contribute to ſome natural Advantages, or ſerve to guard againſt Inconvenience and Diſadvantage. This perhaps may be obſerv'd likewiſe in ſome Articles of The Jewiſh Law: And the Precept in relation to Swine's Fleſh, (if the eating it ſubjected The Jews to greater Inconveniences than were incident to other People) may not improperly be rank'd under this Head.

I muſt advance a Step farther, and aſſert, that ſuch poſitive Precepts may proceed from God, as exclude not only moral, but likewiſe natural Reaſons, in the Senſe before given to theſe Words; or, That God may conſiſtently with his Attributes enjoin thoſe Things, which are indifferent both in a moral and a natural View. We have an Inſtance of this in the Caſe of *Naaman*, who was requir'd, as a Condition of being cur'd of his Leproſy, *to waſh ſeven times in the River Jordan.* [2 *Kings* v. 10.] No Queſtion can ariſe whether there were any moral Fitneſs in this Action. And if it be ſuggeſted, that poſſibly there might be

be ſome natural Virtue in theſe Waters, we may ſtill demand, What natural Virtue could there be in Numbers? Why was *Naaman* required to waſh rather ſeven, than ten times? or, What Reaſon of either Kind can be aſſign'd why one Number ſhould be preferr'd to another?

But what then! will This Gentleman return upon us; Doth not God, in ſuch a Caſe, act *arbitrarily?* "and if He acts arbitrarily "in any one Inſtance, He muſt or may do "ſo in all." p. 124.

What is here ſuggeſted, is built on an equivocal Uſe of the Word *arbitrary*; The Term may be underſtood in different Senſes; and is frequently ſo uſed by this Writer himſelf. Now thus much I do readily allow, If God may act *arbitrarily* in any one Inſtance, He may do ſo in any other Inſtance, the Word being underſtood in the ſame determin'd Senſe of it. But I do deny this Conſequence, if the Senſe and Meaning of the Term be vary'd. What I have noted will be clearer, by pointing out the ſeveral Significations of the Word in reference to our preſent Purpoſe.

Arbitrary ſometimes implies an acting contrary to the moral Reaſons and Fitneſſes of Things. But here I do affirm, in as ſtrong Terms as this Writer, That God is by no means arbitrary. He neither doth, nor poſſibly can deviate from the Rules of Righteouſneſs;

neſs; and in this Senſe doth nothing by mere abſolute Will.

At other times it ſignifies an acting without regard to moral Reaſons, where they are properly a Rule. Here likewiſe I do affirm, that God cannot act arbitrarily. Thoſe things which are morally fit, muſt be the Objects of Divine Approbation; thoſe which are morally unfit, muſt be condemn'd by him. The eternal and neceſſary Rectitude of his Nature requires it.

But then there is another Senſe of the Word, in which I may, and do, affirm, that God is Arbitrary; that he may act by mere Will and Pleaſure; and muſt do ſo, if he acts at all. I mean in thoſe Caſes, where the before-mention'd Reaſons of Things are entirely unconcern'd, and cannot come into Queſtion.

Thus, whether God ſhould create the World in this or that Point of Duration, —— in this or that Part of Space, is in itſelf perfectly indifferent. And yet, if it were ever created at all, it muſt have been produc'd in ſome particular time, and ſome determin'd Space. To affirm therefore roundly, that God cannot do any thing by arbitrary Will, is inconſiſtent with his having created the World; and will carry Men not merely into Deiſm, but into Atheiſm itſelf.

Thus again, in reference to the Divine Commands, I do aſſert, that where the moral and natural Reaſons of Things are out of Queſtion, and therefore incapable of being a Rule, God may preſcribe arbitrarily, and command (if the Expreſſion be underſtood rightly) for commanding ſake. In ſuch Caſes, His Will is a ſufficient Reaſon for our Obedience; and the Exerciſe of our Obedience is a ſufficient Reaſon for his Will.

I do not therefore maintain, that even in ſuch Caſes as theſe, God determines without a Reaſon. I conceive every thing of this kind is entirely impoſſible to an intelligent Being. We ourſelves, imperfect as we are, have ſome Reaſons, right or wrong, for every deliberate Action; and no Queſtion can be made but the ſupreme Intelligence is conſtantly determin'd by ſome Reaſons, and thoſe the beſt which the Nature of the Thing will bear.

What I mean here will be beſt explain'd by obſerving, that there may be a general Reaſon to determine things indifferent, where there is none aſſignable for the particular Determination, or the Preference of one indifferent Thing before another. Thus, in the Inſtance before produced, a Reaſon there was, why the Supreme Being ſhould create the World; and conſequently, a general Reaſon there muſt be for producing it in

ſome determin'd Time: But yet, as it was in itſelf perfectly indifferent, whether it were created ſooner or later, ſo there can be no Reaſon aſſign'd for the particular Determination of Time, or why that one Seaſon was choſen in preference to another.

Thus again, on Suppoſition, that a certain Action is fit and proper, there may be ſeveral Means equally ſerviceable for the Performance of that Action; and ſeveral Circumſtances equally ſuited to it. In ſuch a Caſe as this, there may be a general Reaſon for ſettling either the Means or Circumſtances; the Decency of Life, or Uniformity of Behaviour may ſometimes require it. But yet, as theſe ſeveral Means and Circumſtances are ſuppos'd to be equally ſuited to the Action, in that View there can be no particular Reaſon of Preference; and therefore the Being, who determines them, muſt ſo far act by mere Will and Pleaſure.

Again; Where there are no Reaſons, either moral or natural, in the Senſe before explain'd, for the particular Determination made, there may ſtill be a fit and proper Occaſion; and this, in ſuch Circumſtances, will become a Reaſon. I ſhall explain what I mean by the following Inſtance. The Sacrament of The Lord's Supper conſiſts in Eating Bread, and Drinking Wine, in Remembrance of *Chriſt*, *i. e.* This outward Action is preſcrib'd to us as an Expreſſion of

our Gratitude towards him. Now Gratitude is a moral Duty; and the Duty of receiving the Holy Sacrament, conſider'd as an Act of Gratitude, is of a moral Kind. But then, whether the Eating Bread and Drinking Wine, or the Performance of any other outward Ceremony ſhould be appointed to expreſs our Gratitude; —— This, I ſay, is both in a moral and natural Account, indifferent; and the Inſtitution, in this reſpect, is poſitive. Notwithſtanding this, I muſt affirm, that there was a proper Occaſion for this particular Inſtitution. It is well known, that to eat Bread, and to drink Wine, in an Euchariſtical Way, had obtain'd among the *Jews*, and was in Uſe in our Saviour's Time. He conſecrates therefore this Ceremony; and takes Occaſion from the Practice of the *Jewiſh* Church, to fix and ſettle an Inſtitution of his own.

Once more; Tho' we ſhould ſuppoſe no Reaſons either natural or moral; and no ſuch particular Occaſion as was mention'd before, for giving the Command, yet ſtill I muſt aſſert, that ſuch a Command may poſſibly proceed from God: For, if every other Reaſon were wanting, yet the mere Trial and Exerciſe of our Obedience is of itſelf ſufficient. Whether any Precepts of this Kind have ever been in fact preſcrib'd, is another Queſtion, and which we are no ways concern'd to anſwer. However, I

muſt maintain, that ſuch Precepts may be given us; and that no Concluſions can be drawn to the contrary, either from the Reaſon of the Thing, or the Perfections of the Divine Nature.

I muſt now produce ſuch Arguments as are proper to confirm the point before ſtated: And my

Firſt Proof ſhall be drawn from the Relation which God bears to us as Creator, and that abſolute Authority he muſt neceſſarily have over us on that Account. Now, an Authority of this kind muſt imply in it a Right to command every Thing which is the Object of Command; every Thing in itſelf poſſible to be done, and capable of being requir'd; in ſhort, every Thing conſiſtent with the Reaſon of Things and the Attributes of the Divine Nature.

What Objections then can be alledg'd againſt God's Right of determining Things indifferent? Are Precepts of this Kind incapable of being obey'd? By no means: Are ſuch Things incapable of being requir'd? No: For, if without a Command every Man hath a Right to determine for himſelf, nothing can be plainer than this, that God may, if he pleaſes, determine for him: And there is nothing which Man may rightly perform, but God may as juſtly require it.

Things in themſelves ill and wrong, are not the Objects of Command; and therefore cannot be properly requir'd by any Authority whatſoever. Things in themſelves fit and right, are, I will not ſay barely the *Proper*, but the *Neceſſary* Matter of juſt and wiſe Command: And it is on this Principle I maintain, that the Rules of Virtue muſt be the Commands of God. But then there are other Matters, which are not the neceſſary, but only the poſſible Objects of Authority; Things, which may be either requir'd or forbidden, or left undetermin'd as the Supreme Legiſlator pleaſes; and it is in reference to theſe chiefly that an abſolute Authority is ſhewn.

In a Word; if Things indifferent are capable of being determin'd by any Power, then a Right to determine them muſt be implied in abſolute Authority; and if abſolute Authority may not determine them, then neither ought they to be determin'd by private Will; from whence theſe notable Conſequences may be deduc'd, that there is, ſtrictly ſpeaking, nothing as to its Uſe indifferent, nor hath any Man the leaſt Liberty of Choice at all.

I would argue, in the next place, from the Relation which we bear to God as Creatures, and that full and entire Subjection to him which this Relation muſt neceſſarily lay us under. As therefore we are bound from hence

hence to obey every Precept which God gives us, ſo on the other hand God may give us any Precepts which are fitted to try this Obedience. But will a ſerious Perſon aſſert, that Things indifferent cannot become Matter of ſuch a Trial? May we not perform thoſe Things in virtue of a Command, which we might juſtly have perform'd without a Command? And if we do ſo, Do we not by this expreſs our Obedience? Nay, Do we not expreſs it in the moſt ample manner by performing thoſe Things, for which we have no Reaſon but purely the Command itſelf? If this be true, then I may venture to aſſert, that poſitive Precepts are not only capable of being given us, but the moſt proper Exerciſe of our abſolute Subjection to the Supreme Being.

Obedience may indeed be ſhewn in other Caſes too. We may, and I hope all of us do regard the Will of God in performing thoſe Things which are in themſelves fitting. In theſe Caſes we are acted by two diſtinct Principles; the appearing Fitneſs of the Thing, and a Senſe of the Divine Pleaſure. But it is the later Principle only which makes our Actions Inſtances of Obedience. Any farther than we conſider moral Virtues as the Will of God, and practiſe them upon that account, we do not properly obey God at all; we may indeed be term'd moral Men, but not in the leaſt religious.

Now, if Religion itſelf conſiſts in obeying God, or the acting in virtue of a Divine Command, then I conceive it is plain, that thoſe Things may become Inſtances of Duty and Matter of Religion, for which no Reaſon can be aſſign'd but the Command. Our Author indeed denies this, and aſſerts, that we are oblig'd to act no farther than the Thing requir'd had an antecedent Fitneſs, and was proper to have been done without any Injunction. Nay, as tho' he had not carried the Matter high enough, he maintains over and above, that nothing can be Matter of Duty, the Reaſon and Fitneſs of which is not laid open to us. This is bold indeed! and I conceive at one Stroke directly overthrows all Obligations of Obedience to God. For, if we are concern'd to perform every thing, the moral Fitneſs of which appears, even without the Intervention of a Precept; and if the Divine Authority itſelf cannot oblige us but by aſſigning the moral Reaſons of the Precept; then all Engagements on our Part muſt ariſe, not from the Conſideration of the Divine Will, but of our own Reaſon. On this Foot all Authority on God's Part, and all Obedience on ours, muſt be perfectly deſtroy'd.

To this I will deſire Liberty to add another Argument drawn from the manifeſt and inexcuſable Abſurdities of the contrary Opinion. If God cannot give us poſitive Precepts,

cepts, nor require any thing to be done by us which was not equally neceſſary before the Command, then I conceive this Conſequence ariſes; neither hath any other Being a Right to preſcribe in Matters of this Nature; for, there can be no Right or Power in the Creature, which doth not ſubſiſt more eminently in the Creator. Let us ſee how, on this Foot, Society and Government can be ſupported.

In the firſt place, Nothing can be requir'd by the Civil Power, which was not, upon its own account, incumbent on us antecedently to the Preſcription: And where different Meaſures may equally conduce to the ſame End, there they muſt be left entirely undetermin'd; becauſe, in ſuch Caſes, there can be no particular Reaſon for Choice or Preference. From whence it will follow, that one of the great Deſigns of Civil Power is entirely voided, *viz.* An uniting the whole Force of the Community, and a joint proſecuting the ſame End by the ſame Means.

In the next place; Before any Civil Injunctions can take place, the particular Reaſon and Fitneſs of the Injunction muſt likewiſe be given. This hath been aſſerted with regard to God; and therefore muſt equally hold with regard to the Civil Magiſtrate. Now, if no Command can be effectual unleſs the Reaſons of it be diſtinctly ſet forth, it is equally neceſſary, that the

Strength

Strength and Force of theſe Reaſons ſhould be diſtinctly perceiv'd: For, to that Perſon, by whom they are not perceiv'd, they are not Reaſons. From hence it follows, that no Subject is bound to act in any Inſtance farther than he himſelf thinks fit, and is inclin'd to do ſo. For, on this Hypotheſis, he can be under no Obligation but what ariſes from the Reaſons perceiv'd by him; of which he only is the proper Judge; and therefore, he only can determine whether the Command ſhall be obſerv'd or no. If this be the Condition of Things, and Liberty is to be underſtood in ſuch a Latitude, then are we reduc'd to a State of Nature indeed: Every Man hath a Right to act in all reſpects as in his own great Wiſdom he ſhall judge fit: No one hath any Pretence to cenſure or puniſh him: Every one who offers to controul him, doth ſo far uſurp on his native Privilege: He is plainly Lord of himſelf, and entirely independent on any Authority whatſoever. Theſe are Poſitions no more conſiſtent with general Intereſt than common Senſe.

Let us ſee now what Objections are alledg'd by our Author againſt the Poſſibility of poſitive Precepts in Matters of Religion. And,

1. He objects, that if God be unchangeable, our Duty to him muſt be ſo too; from the Beginning of the World to the End of it always

always the ſame; incapable of being chang'd either in whole or in part: And conſequently, that no Perſon, if he comes from God, can teach us any other Religion, or give us any Precepts but what are founded on the Relations in which we ſtand to God and Man [p. 20.]

We allow and contend that God is unchangeable in his Nature and his Will; and the general Duties which we owe to him are likewiſe unchangeable. Love, Thankfulneſs, Truſt and Obedience ever were, and ever will be Duties; to which may be added all the ſeveral Methods of Conduct, which reſult from the Relations in which we ſtand either to God or our fellow Creatures. But the Queſtion before us, is, Whether God may not ſuperadd to theſe ſome Points of a poſitive Nature; whether, ſince Obedience in the general is a Duty founded on the moral Reaſons of Things, God may not aſſign ſome particular Inſtances for the Exerciſe of this Obedience; and eſpecially, if the Things inſiſted on be, in ſome reſpects, naturally convenient, and adapted to the Service and Improvement of Vertue?

Our Author maintains the contrary; and alledges, "that to ſuppoſe any things [en-"join'd by Revelation] which are not of a "moral Kind, and did not oblige perpe-"tually, muſt ſuppoſe a Change in the "Mind of God." [p. 131.] If there be any

any Force in this Kind of arguing, it muſt be reſolv'd into the following Principle, *viz.* God cannot will that any thing ſhould be done in Time, which he did not will ſhould be done from Eternity. If this be admitted, then muſt we deny, that the World was ever created by him; and that he can, conſiſtently with his Attributes, exert any Acts whatſoever *ad extra*; for ſuch Acts muſt be exerted in Time; and conſequently, muſt ſuppoſe ſome prior and antecedent Duration. But, according to this Gentleman, ſuch a Change in reference to the Acts of God, muſt infer a like Change of Will; and therefore muſt entirely deſtroy his Immutability.

The real truth of the Caſe is this; God neither does, nor wills any thing in Time, which he did not will from Eternity: But then, what he will'd from Eternity may receive its Effect and Accompliſhment in Time; And the particular Seaſon in which it is accompliſh'd, is that very Seaſon which God determin'd from all Eternity. The *Jewiſh* Inſtitution was what God will'd from all Ages: But then he decreed, that this Inſtitution ſhould take place in ſome determin'd Time; ſhould laſt for a certain Period; ſhould at length give way to another Inſtitution more perfect, and better accommodated to the then State and Condition of Things. In this way of thinking, however

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the particular Inſtances of Obedience be varied, the Divine Will is one and unvaried.

I have taken occaſion to obſerve before, that God never does or injoins any thing without ſome ſufficient Reaſons; as theſe Reaſons therefore vary, his Acts muſt vary likewiſe: His Will however is unchang'd, as being always ſuited to that which is proper and reaſonable. In this I am ſupported by a notable Conceſſion of our Author himſelf, *viz.* "To alter one's Conduct as Cir-
"cumſtances alter, is not only an Act of
"the greateſt Prudence and Judgment, but
"is conſiſtent with the greateſt Steadineſs." p. 105. If this be true, then to give us poſitive Inſtitutions on proper Occaſions; or, to alter theſe Inſtitutions as Circumſtances alter, is entirely defenſible; is an Act of Reaſon and Prudence; is conſiſtent with the greateſt Steadineſs; or, with that very Immutability from which the preſent Objection is drawn.

That Precepts of this kind therefore may be alter'd, doth not ariſe from any Change in the Will of God, but from the Circumſtances of Things themſelves. They were originally impos'd, whenever they have been impos'd, not abſolutely without any Reaſon; this State of the Caſe we reject entirely; there are, and always muſt be ſome Reaſons for them, tho' they may not appear to us. But as theſe very Reaſons are themſelves mutable,

mutable, ſo theſe Precepts muſt be ſo too: And the Change of ſuch Inſtitutions, as the Reaſons of them alter, is, in truth, an Argument of the Stability of God's Will, which unalterably reſolves upon thoſe things which are beſt and fitteſt upon the whole.

A ſecond Objection, drawn from God's Wiſdom, is thus ſet forth; "Whatſoever "is in itſelf indifferent, either as to Matter "or Manner, muſt be ſo to an all-wiſe Being, "who judges of Things as they are: And "for the ſame Reaſon that he commands "Things that are Good, and forbids thoſe "which are Evil, he leaves Men at Liberty "in all Things indifferent" [p. 122.] — "To ſuppoſe [the contrary] would be to "make God act unreaſonably; ſince all "thoſe Reaſons which oblig'd him to com-"mand Good, and to forbid Evil Things, "muſt wholly ceaſe in relation to a Sub-"ject, which by being indifferent partakes "of neither." [p. 134, 135.]

If there be any Force in the Argument here alledg'd, it will carry us a great deal farther than this Writer himſelf intends: It will conclude not only againſt God's determining in Things indifferent, but likewiſe againſt all Determinations of this Kind, tho' they ſhould ariſe from private Will and Pleaſure; and conſequently, whilſt our Author would ſeem to enlarge Men's Liberty, he doth moſt effectually ſubvert it. For,

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if it be inconſiſtent with Wiſdom in God to command or forbid Things in themſelves indifferent, (becauſe it is ſuppos'd there can be no End or Reaſon for ſuch Determination) it muſt be equally inconſiſtent with Wiſdom in Men to make any Choice in Caſes of this Nature; and ſo far forth as they preſume to act either way, they muſt deviate from what is fit and proper, as chuſing without any ſufficient Grounds or Reaſons of Choice. According to this way of arguing, Things by being indifferent in themſelves, are not indifferent as to their Uſe; and to leave Men to their Liberty is to deſtroy it.

I do readily allow, that to an all-wiſe Being every Thing appears as it really is; Things eſſentially Good, as ſuch; Things eſſentially Evil, as Evil; and Things in themſelves indifferent, as indifferent: But then I do deny the Conſequence which our Author would deduce from thence, *viz.* that God cannot, conſiſtently with his Wiſdom, give us any Precepts in reference to Things indifferent. I muſt maintain the direct oppoſite Concluſion; and aſſert, That if an all-wiſe Being judges of Things indifferent as ſuch, he muſt judge of them as the poſſible Objects of Command; for the very Nature of Indifferency conſiſts in this, that Things of that Kind may equally be determin'd to either Side.

Nor

Nor will it at all follow, that if Points of this Kind ſhould be ſettled by a Divine Command, God would in ſuch Caſes act unreaſonably. I do admit, that all thoſe Reaſons which oblig'd him to command thoſe Things which are in themſelves Good, and to forbid thoſe Things which are in themſelves Evil, muſt wholly ceaſe in relation to a Subject, which by being indifferent partakes of neither. Theſe Reaſons, I grant, muſt ceaſe: But what then? Does it follow, that becauſe Precepts of this Kind are not founded on moral and neceſſary Reaſons, therefore they can be built on none at all? If Precepts of this Kind may prove ſubſervient to the Intereſts of Virtue; if they may conduce to ſome temporal Convenience; if they may promote the Order and Decency of civil or religious Life; if, laſtly, they may be a proper Exerciſe of our entire Obedience to the Divine Will, then there may be Reaſons for giving them: And if ſuch Reaſons there really are, then to determine Points in a moral View indifferent, is not to act unreaſonably.

Of this our Author was aware; and therefore ſubjoins, "If there were any Reaſon to deprive Men of their Liberty in "Things indifferent, they would then ceaſe "to be indifferent." The Fallacy of the Argument lies in the Uſe of the Word *Indifferent*, which muſt be oppos'd, not to prudential,

dential, but to moral and abſolutely neceſſary Reaſons. It is in this Senſe our Author, on moſt Occaſions, uſes it; and the Queſtion I have all along been debating is thus ſtated by himſelf, *viz.* "Whether God, who for "many Ages did not command or forbid "any Thing, but what was moral or im-"moral, hath in ſome Caſes iſſu'd out Com-"mands, which have no Foundation in "Reaſon." Commands which have no Foundation in Reaſon, muſt plainly ſignify Commands not founded in moral Reaſons: And, on ſeveral other Occaſions, he ſtrenuouſly maintains, that nothing can become Matter of Religion, which is not in itſelf, and eternally obliging. If this be the Caſe, then Things may ſtill remain in themſelves indifferent, notwithſtanding the foregoing Reaſons for determining their Uſe; and to ſettle them, may, in a prudential View, be proper, tho' it were not abſolutely and eternally neceſſary.

A Third Objection is drawn from God's Goodneſs, the whole Amount of which is this; to give us poſitive Precepts, or to determine Things in themſelves indifferent, muſt ſo far impair that Liberty, in which our Happineſs itſelf conſiſts: [V. p. 135.] It hazards, without any Neceſſity, our eternal Concerns, and muſt place Men in a much worſe Condition, than if they had

been only ſubject to the Law of Nature. [V. p. 125.]

It is aſſerted, in the firſt place, that God cannot preſcribe to us in Matters indifferent, becauſe this is inconſiſtent with human Happineſs; and it is aſſerted farther, that human Happineſs muſt depend on our Liberty in all ſuch Things. Yet, notwithſtanding this, our Author is ſo little ſenſible of the Difficulties which ariſe from hence, that, in another place, he repreſents the extream Eaſineſs of obeying ſuch Precepts; and tells us, "There is nothing of this Kind which "ſome Men will not punctually obſerve, "in hopes to attone for their darling Vices." [p. 142, 177.] Thus far indeed he aſſerts truly, and may be juſtified by Fact and Experience. But doth not this ſuppoſe, that there may be leſs Trouble in obeying Precepts of a poſitive, than of a moral Kind? and conſequently, that mere Obedience is no more inconſiſtent with preſent Happineſs in the one Caſe, than in the other?

In truth, to give us poſitive Commands on proper Occaſions, is ſo far from deſtroying, that it really tends to improve our Happineſs. If the Commands are any way inſtrumental to moral Virtue; or ſerve to promote ſome temporal Advantage; or to guard againſt ſome temporal Diſadvantage, the Point before us is clear: Things are then

then determin'd for our Good; and the Uſe of our Liberty is reſtrain'd in thoſe Caſes, in which we might otherwiſe turn it againſt ourſelves.

To this we may add, that if there be in human Nature a ſtrong Appetite of Freedom, (as indeed there is) yet ſtill no moral Pleaſures can ariſe from the Exerciſe of ſuch a Freedom. The Satisfaction of having made a Choice on trifling Conſiderations is itſelf trifling: But to conſider, that whilſt we act, we pay an Obedience to an all-good and an all-wiſe Being, this cannot but miniſter to us a Pleaſure indeed: And we ſhall reap a Satisfaction from the Conſciouſneſs of obeying God vaſtly ſuperior to any Thing we can gain by gratifying ourſelves.

To go on; It is alledg'd, in the next place, that to give us poſitive Commands, is to hazard, without any Neceſſity, our Eternal Concerns. And as God cannot puniſh us for neglecting thoſe Things which have no Worth or Value in themſelves, ſo it is equally impoſſible he ſhould give us any Precepts in relation to them. [V. p. 122.]

But I would deſire to know, whether Obedience to the Will of God be not a moral and neceſſary Duty: If it be ſo, then Diſobedience muſt be eſſentially wrong and puniſhable; and Men incur the Divine Diſpleaſure, not by neglecting a Thing indifferent, but diſobeying a Divine Command.

The Caſe therefore is not fairly ſtated in the Objection. The doing or forbearing Things indifferent, are not the Terms of Salvation: It is plac'd on quite another Foot, *viz.* An Obedience to the Will of God: This ſurely is by no means unneceſſary; becauſe it is in its own Nature and eternally unfit, that thoſe ſhould enjoy the Divine Favour, who are regardleſs of the Divine Pleaſure.

How far God's Will reaches in this regard, is, or may be known by us certainly; for nothing can be to us a Matter of Duty, which is plac'd beyond our Knowledge. But then, if we wilfully neglect to inform ourſelves; or being inform'd, perverſly diſpute the Point, we act diſagreeably to that Relation in which we ſtand to God; and the Miſeries which we incur thereby, do not ariſe from the Will of a capricious or unkind Being, but the unalterable Determinations of infinite Wiſdom and Goodneſs.

There remains but one Thing farther to be conſider'd under this Head, *viz.* That to give Men poſitive Precepts muſt place them in a worſe Condition, than if they were only ſubject to the Law of Nature. Thoſe who have no other Law, can be judg'd by that alone; and therefore cannot hazard the Favour of God by a Diſregard to Things indifferent.

The Objection is built on this Principle, *viz.* that our Condition muſt be neceſſarily either

either worſe or better, in proportion as our Obligations are of a greater or leſs Extent; thoſe being ſuppos'd the happieſt who have leaſt to do, and feweſt Duties to diſcharge. If this extravagant Principle be admitted, then muſt we aſſert, that the wiſeſt and greateſt Men are more unhappy than the meaneſt and moſt illiterate; becauſe their Circumſtances and Views of Things will proportionably increaſe their Duties; and ſeveral Points will be to them obligatory, from which the Condition of other Perſons might excuſe them. From hence it follows, that as Improvement in Wiſdom and Knowledge is a Misfortune; and Men's Happineſs conſiſts, not in knowing, but being ignorant, ſo thoſe Beings which know the leaſt, (and therefore are moſt free from religious Obligations) are moſt happy. Let our Adverſaries purſue this Concluſion, and prefer, if they pleaſe, the Condition of Brutes before that of Men: Theſe Creatures, as they are incapable of any Obligations, ſo can they run no Hazards.

In truth, our Happineſs is not impair'd, but increas'd by the Extent of our religious Knowledge. If our Obligations are from hence enlarg'd, the Advantages which will ariſe from anſwering theſe Obligations muſt be proportionable: And the Rewards of Obedience will always ballance the Puniſhments of Diſobedience.

I have noted already, that abſolute Submiſſion to the Divine Will is a neceſſary Duty. The Trial and Exerciſe therefore of this Submiſſion cannot place us in a worſe State than the Exerciſe of any other Duty. It ſerves to improve and better us, and to render us more fit Objects of Favour.

Still the Argument will be ſtronger, if the Matters in which our Obedience is try'd ſhall likewiſe help forward the common Intereſts of Virtue; if they are Fences againſt Temptations; apt to ſuggeſt to us proper Sentiments; or, in any other reſpect, conduce to the Improvement of a virtuous Temper. If this be the Caſe, then Precepts of this Kind ſerve not to hazard, but to ſecure and facilitate our Salvation; and to neglect them, when given, is to deſert the Intereſts of that Virtue, they are intended to ſupport.

I am carried on by this Remark to conſider a fourth Objection alledg'd by our Author, *viz.* That poſitive Precepts are prejudicial to the real Intereſts of Virtue; and lead the way to the groſſeſt and moſt ſenſeleſs Superſtition. The Objection is thus ſtated p. 141. "It is certain that the Mind "may be overloaded as well as the Body: "And the more it is taken up with the "Obſervation of Things which are not of a "moral Nature, the leſs will it be able to "attend to thoſe that are; which requiring "the Application of the whole Man, can "never

"never be rightly perform'd, while the "Mind, by laying ſtreſs on other Things, "is diverted from attending on them; eſpe- "cially if it be conſider'd, that Superſtition, "if once ſuffer'd to mix with Religion, will "always be gaining Ground. If Reaſon is "to be heard; no unneceſſary Things "will be admitted; but, if it be not, "where ſhall we ſtop? If People are once "brought to believe that ſuch Things are "good for any Thing, they will be apt "to believe that they are good for all "Things."

Two Things are here aſſerted; 1. That poſitive Precepts muſt overload the Mind, and draw it off from attending to Things of a moral Nature. 2. That they introduce Superſtition; becauſe, if Men are brought to believe that theſe Things [*i. e.* poſitive Inſtitutions] are good for any Thing, they will be apt to believe they are good for all Things.

With reference to the former Part of the Objection, it muſt indeed be own'd, that real Virtue and Religion, may, in certain Caſes, be prejudic'd by ritual and ceremonious Performances. This ill Conſequence muſt ariſe, when they are either too numerous; or elſe, when they are not properly expreſſive of that Religion they are pretended to ſupport; or, laſtly, when they are not ſuited to the State and Condition of thoſe

thoſe Perſons on whom they are impos'd. But, if poſitive Inſtitutions may, in ſome Caſes, be prejudicial, doth it follow, they muſt therefore be ſo in all? Are Fire and Water abſolutely uſeleſs and miſchievous, becauſe in certain Circumſtances the worſt Conſequences have ariſen from them? In like manner, poſitive Inſtitutions may be of real Service in ſome Caſes, whatever Inconveniences may poſſibly ariſe in others; for the Prejudice they may occaſion, doth by no means ariſe from hence, that they are poſitive, but from another quite different Conſideration.

Let us admit, that the Mind may be overloaded; and that too much Shew and and Outſide may divert us from attending to Matters of more Importance. What then! Is nothing of this Kind to be allow'd of; and muſt we reject the Uſe, becauſe Inconveniences will ariſe from the Abuſe of it? Our Author indeed aſſerts, "That Things "of a moral Nature require the Application "of the whole Man, and therefore can "never be rightly perform'd whilſt the "Mind, by laying Streſs on other Things, "is diverted from attending to them." To which we reply, That altho' the Matter of poſitive Inſtitutions be not, as to its Nature, moral, yet Obedience to them, when commanded by God, is ſo; and the Streſs which is, or ought to be laid on them, does not

regard

regard their mere Matter, (which is confeſs'd to be in itſelf indifferent) but the Will and Authority of the Impoſer; from whence it follows, that the Mind is ſo far from being diverted, by Inſtitutions of this Kind, from attending to moral Duty, that the right Obſervation of them implies and requires a ſtrict Attention to it. To which may be added farther, that poſitive Inſtitutions themſelves may have a direct View to Morality or Religion; They may be of ſingular Uſe and Service this Way; and conſequently, they are ſo far from being eſſentially injurious, that ſomething of this Kind may be highly neceſſary to ſupport it.

To make this more evident, I ſhall obſerve, that no Religion hath ever yet ſubſiſted in Fact without ſome Inſtitutions. Mere Natural Religion, without any thing inſtituted of any Kind, is nothing but Idea, and hath no Exiſtence but in the Mind. Where God hath not been pleas'd to make Appointments of this Nature, Men have done it for themſelves; and hence 'tis that ſuch Inſtitutions have been liable to the ſame Imperfections to which Men themſelves are ſubject. Yet, however frequently they have err'd in their particular Determinations, their Judgment concerning the general Point is unqueſtionable; and the Argument to be drawn from hence hath all that Force, which

general

general, —— I may ſay, univerſal Conſent can give it.

Let it be obſerv'd, in the next place, that one great Point of Religion, is, The Worſhip of the Supreme Being. Now, admitting that the Excellency of religious Worſhip will depend on the inward Senſe of the Worſhipper, yet ſtill, this Worſhip itſelf cannot be perform'd without ſomething external. It requires Rites and Ceremonies of ſome Kind or other. It implies not only an inward Senſe of the Divine Perfections, and of our Engagements to the Supreme Being, but likewiſe ſuch an outward Expreſſion of it, that the reſt of Mankind may be Witneſſes of our Piety. But can this be done without any Rites at all? Are Men intimately conſcious to each other's Thoughts; or, are they capable of knowing them, otherwiſe than they are reveal'd by ſomething external? As well might we reaſon and diſcourſe with each other, without the Uſe of Signs, as expreſs our Piety, in the preſent Caſe, without ſomething external.

It may be noted farther, that as external Rites are neceſſary, as being Expreſſions of our inward Piety, ſo are they likewiſe uſeful to ſtrengthen and cheriſh this Piety itſelf. I do by no means affirm, that Rites of every Kind are ſerviceable in this Caſe. A wrong Choice may indeed be made. But what I maintain, is this; Rites, when fitly choſen,

may

may become the Signs of ſomething internal; and when they are ſo, the right Uſe of them will ſuggeſt thoſe Sentiments of which they are the Signs. Thus it happens in other Caſes likewiſe: Words, whether ſpoken or written, have no neceſſary Connection with Ideas, nor are they naturally ſignificant: But yet, when the Senſe of them is once determin'd by Uſe, they ſuggeſt to us the Ideas they are deſign'd to repreſent, and become uſeful even in the Exerciſe of our own inward Reaſoning.

I hope it may appear from this kind of arguing, that poſitive Inſtitutions are not Incumbrances on real Virtue and Religion; that they do not neceſſarily divert the Mind from that which is in its own Nature excellent; but may, when diſcreetly choſen, become ſerviceable to the beſt Purpoſes. Still it will be inſiſted, that whatever Uſe may poſſibly be made of them, yet this is ballanc'd by Conſequences of another Kind. It hath been affirm'd, that they lead the Way to Superſtition; "For if Men are once "brought to believe that theſe Things "are good for any Thing, they will be "apt to believe that they are good for all "Things."

In reply to this, I muſt acknowledge, that it is difficult to account for all the Follies of Mankind. There are no Principles, however certain or important, from which weak Men

Men may not pretend to draw bad Concluſions; nor are there any Matters, however uſeful, which may not be applied to evil Purpoſes by the perverſe. The Queſtion therefore, in the preſent Caſe, ought to be, *Not*, Whether weak Perſons may not ſometimes make a bad Uſe of poſitive Inſtitutions; but, Whether ſuch Inſtitutions do of themſelves lead to it: — *Not*, Whether Men may not, by perverting theſe Inſtitutions, become ſuperſtitious; but, Whether the right Uſe of them doth, in its own Nature, tend to Superſtition.

Our Author, who objects againſt poſitive Inſtitutions on this Foot, in another Place tells us, that Religion itſelf hath been made the Cauſe of Miſchief, and render'd deſtructive of the common Welfare. To this purpoſe he obſerves [p. 165.] "Tho' we cry "up the great Advantage we have above "other Animals in being capable of Reli-"gion, yet thoſe Animals we deſpiſe for "the Want of it, herd moſt ſocially toge-"ther, *&c.*" — And afterwards, "Men, "tho' they cannot ſubſiſt but in Society, "and have Hands, Speech, and Reaſon to "qualify them for the Bleſſing of it above "all other Animals; nay, what is more, "have Religion, deſign'd to unite them in "the firm Bonds of Love and Friendſhip, "and to engage them to vie with one ano-"ther in all good Offices; and the good-

"natur'd

" natur'd Laity too have, at a vaſt Expence,
" hir'd Perſons to inculcate theſe generous
" Notions; yet, alas! in ſpite of all theſe
" Helps and Motives, Religion has been
" made, by theſe very Perſons, a Pretence
" to render Men unſociable, fierce, and
" cruel, and to act every thing deſtructive
" to the common Welfare." What then; muſt all Religion therefore be diſcarded? One might be tempted to ſuſpect that theſe are our Author's Sentiments; for he introduces his Reflections in this Place by intimating, that Animals which want Religion are in better Circumſtances than thoſe which have it. But, whatever this Gentleman may think of the Matter, it will be difficult to perſuade Mankind to part with their Religion on this Score. They will be apt to imagine that theſe Miſchiefs ariſe rather from the Want of inward Religion, than the having it; and conſequently, that this is a ſtronger Argument for cultivating Religion, than diſcarding it.

Yet be this as it will; as to the Caſe of poſitive Inſtitutions I muſt obſerve, that they do not of themſelves lead to Superſtition. This conſiſts in laying greater Streſs on Matters which reſpect Religion, or are ſuppos'd to do ſo, than they can bear: Whilſt therefore Men conſider Things as they really are, no Superſtition can ariſe. To obſerve poſitive Inſtitutions as ſuch, is to act agreeably

ably to the Nature of Things; it gives them their juſt and proper Weight; and conſequently, is neither ſuperſtitious in itſelf, nor hath it the leaſt Tendency that Way: And to obſerve them as appointed by God, when they have in fact been ſo appointed, is to conſider Things as they really are; it aſcribes to them juſt ſo much as Things ſo conſider'd, demand; and therefore muſt be highly fitting and reaſonable.

With reference to this Point, Men betray their Superſtition principally in theſe Three Caſes, *viz.* Either by conſidering Things which are merely Poſitive, as excellent in themſelves, and in their own Nature Moral; Or elſe, by conſidering Inſtitutions merely Human, as Divine; Or, laſtly, by laying too great Weight on any Inſtitutions, whether Human or Divine. And it muſt be confeſs'd that Men have, at different Times, err'd in each of theſe reſpects. However, is this a Reaſon why God ſhould give us no poſitive Inſtitutions at all?

Our Author, I have obſerv'd, chuſes the Affirmative, and builds on this Principle, "that if Men are brought to believe that "poſitive Inſtitutions are good for any "Thing, they will be apt to believe they "are good for all Things." They will be apt to believe this: —— But from whence doth this Aptneſs, this Tendency to Superſtition ariſe? —— From the Nature of poſitive

tive Inſtitutions? By no means; for poſitive Inſtitutions, as ſuch, do not lead us to think them Moral; Human Inſtitutions, as Human, do not lead us to think them Divine; and, admitting that poſitive Inſtitutions are good for ſomething, it doth by no means follow, nor doth it ſeem to follow, that they muſt be good for all Things.

The Caſe is plain enough from our Author's own State of it. "If, ſays he, Men "are brought to believe that poſitive Inſti- "tutions are good for any Thing, *They will* "*be apt* to believe, that they are good for "all Things." This Error ariſes purely from themſelves, and the ſad Corruptions they give way to. They are willing to compound Matters at the eaſieſt Rate; and becauſe the outward Ceremonies of Religion are more eaſily gone thro', than inward and ſincere Piety, they endeavour to make theſe Performances ſerve inſtead of it. A fatal Error this, no doubt, and ſuch as takes off from all the Worth and Value of theſe Performances themſelves. But if, in order to avoid this Conſequence, all poſitive Inſtitutions were diſcarded, would this at all mend the Matter? Would there be leſs Impiety, or leſs Superſtition than there is at preſent? I believe not: By giving up theſe Out-guards of Religion, we cannot long preſerve the inward Senſe of it; for Natural Religion never yet ſubſiſted without ſomething of In-

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ſtituted. And as to Superſtition, pray how is this entirely remov'd by diſcarding Inſtitutions? May we not ſhew as much Superſtition by an unreaſonable Avoiding, as by a groundleſs and fond Practice of certain Things? Is not This, to lay greater Streſs on an Omiſſion, than the Nature of the Thing will bear; and conſequently, Is not this a real Inſtance of Superſtition?

One thing more I muſt note on this Occaſion, *viz.* that Men may as really diſcover Superſtition in the Practice of Moral Duties, as the Performance of Inſtituted. For, if Superſtition implies the laying greater Streſs on any Matters relating to Religion, than they can reaſonably bear, then in all thoſe Caſes where Men over-rate any moral Performances, and make one Duty ſupply the room of others, they are really ſuperſtitious. But is this an imaginary or groundleſs Suppoſition? Have we not daily Inſtances of Perſons, who hope to attone for their Miſcarriages in one Kind by an extraordinary Rigour in others? Is not Benevolence, and Good-nature itſelf ſometimes made the Whole of Religion; —— To cover every other Defect, and to ſupply the Want of every other Virtue? Pray what is this, but a Superſtition in Morals? What then; Muſt Morality therefore be diſcarded, and to avoid Supperſtition, muſt we run ourſelves into Profaneneſs? No certainly; This is an Error in the worſt Extream,

Extream, and will be follow'd by Conſequences Ten thouſand times more dangerous than the worſt Kind of Superſtition can lead Men into.

I muſt grant indeed, that Superſtition is bad, and we are concern'd to guard againſt it as well as we can. But How, after all, muſt we do this? —— By reducing every Thing to Natural Religion? This, alas! is an impracticable Scheme; and, if practicable, yet would not reach the Purpoſe, unleſs we could make Men in every reſpect Wiſe; which, if we were able to do, no Difficulties would ever ariſe from Matters Inſtituted.

In ſhort, there is but one way of doing this to any Purpoſe: Let us endeavour heartily to diſcover the Will of God, Whether by the Light of Human Reaſon, or from Divine Revelation. Whatever ſhall appear to be the Divine Will from either Conſideration, we muſt adhere to it inviolably; Whatever cannot be prov'd on this Foot, is no Part of Religion. This is the general Rule, to which we muſt add Nothing, and from which we muſt diminiſh Nothing. To do the one is Superſtition, to do the other is Impiety.

CHAP. IV.

Whether Natural and Reveal'd Religion be neceſſarily one and the ſame; and if not, Wherein the proper Diſtinction between them doth conſiſt.

THIS Queſtion naturally ariſes from the two laſt, and will receive a Determination from conſidering what may reaſonably be offered on thoſe former Heads. If the Law, or Religion of Nature be abſolutely perfect; and if it be immutable in ſuch a Senſe as to be incapable either of Addition or Diminution, we muſt, I think, conclude (as our Author does) "That Natural and Reveal'd Religion are one and "the ſame; that they differ only as to the "Manner of their being communicated; "[p. 3.] and that Chriſtianity, tho' the "Name be of a later Date, muſt be as old "and extenſive as human Nature." [p. 4.] But, on the other Hand, If the Law or Religion

igion of Nature be not abſolutely perfect; nor immutable in that Senſe in which our Author contends it is, then we ſhall be obliged to take the other Side of the Queſtion, and to maintain that they differ from each other, as well with regard to the Subject Matter of each, as the Way and Manner of their being made known to us.

But however, tho' our Author be thus far regular in his Deduction, whilſt he infers the entire Unity of Natural and Reveal'd Religion, from the abſolute Perfection and Immutability of the former, yet I cannot ſee why, upon the Whole of his Scheme, he ſhould be led to take any Notice of this Concluſion at all. It is the great Deſign of his Book to prove, That there neither hath been, nor can be any Revelation. If this be ſo, then what Occaſion is there for inſiſting, that Natural and Reveal'd Religion muſt be the ſame? What Occaſion for ſuppoſing a Point, which, upon his Principles, he muſt not ſuppoſe; and which it is his great Purpoſe to overthrow? It muſt ſeem odd to every By-ſtander, that this Gentleman ſhould concern himſelf with proving ſuch extraordinary Points as theſe, "That "Natural and Reveal'd Religion are one "and the ſame;" and, "That Chriſtiani-"ty is as old as the Creation," whilſt his real Sentiments moſt apparently are, That there is no ſuch Thing as Reveal'd Religi-

on, and that Chriſtianity in particular is a groſs Impoſture. For, the Gentleman who here maintains that Natural and Reveal'd Religion are one as to Matter, in other Places contends as heartily, that there is but one Way, one Method of diſcovering Religion, *viz.* by the Uſe of our natural Faculties, p. 5. If this be true, then we can learn Nothing from Revelation at all; and if Nothing can be learn'd from it, then it is to all Intents and Purpoſes no Revelation.

The Truth is, The Gentleman did not care to ſpeak out at once. He hath endeavoured therefore to draw his Readers on gradually. At firſt he played faſt and looſe with the Notion of the Law of Nature; which Point being, as he thought, ſufficiently obſcur'd, he proceeded to ſhew, that this Law muſt be abſolutely perfect; if ſo, it muſt be immutable, incapable of Addition or Diminution; and conſequently, Nothing can be requir'd in Time which did not equally oblige always. From hence he infers, that there can be no Manner of Difference between Natural and Reveal'd Religion: He tells us, That both having the ſame End, their Precepts muſt be the ſame; and "That they "muſt preſcribe the ſame Means, ſince thoſe "Means which at one Time promote hu-"man Happineſs, equally promote it at all "Times." p. 104. Beyond this he attempts to prove farther, That every man knows,

or

or may eaſily know all that this abſolutely perfect Law of Nature contains under it; — That a Revelation therefore is entirely needleſs;— That this Revelation cannot make any Thing more clear than it was before;— That, as on the one Hand, there is none Occaſion for a Revelation, ſo there can be no ſufficient Proof that ſuch a Revelation hath ever been made at all; That the Pretences to it have given Birth to many monſtrous Opinions and Practices, to which a wiſe and good Being could never poſſibly afford Occaſion: In ſhort, That Superſtition and Immorality cannot be avoided on any other Foot, than by adhering entirely to Natural Religion, and diſcarding all Pretences whatſoever to Revelation.

Had this Scheme been open'd all at once, and ſet forth in expreſs Words at firſt, it would have ſhock'd almoſt every Reader, and have prevented thoſe Impreſſions, which it was our Author's Deſign to make. This oblig'd him to ſpeak ſometimes with Reſerve; ſometimes to make Suppoſitions contrary to the very Scheme he would inculcate; and ſometimes even to acknowledge the Reality of that Revelation he would diſprove. There is none other way than this, of accounting for his Conduct on certain Occaſions; for I cannot by any Means think, that he erred in this reſpect caſually, or did not ſee that he had really acknowledged

or ſuppoſed what, on his Principles as explain'd in other Places, he was oblig'd neither to acknowledge nor ſuppoſe.

The latter Part of the foregoing Scheme ſhall be examined hereafter in its proper place; at preſent, I am concerned to ſearch, Whether Natural and Reveal'd Religion, if a Revelation there be, muſt be neceſſarily one and the ſame.

The Negative, I conceive, will appear from hence; That God may, if he pleaſes, iſſue out Commands, which are not built on the moral Reaſons of Things; that he may give us poſitive Precepts, which Precepts cannot be given us otherwiſe than by Revelation: For Natural Religion, as our Author himſelf contends, includes nothing of a poſitive Nature. If therefore Precepts of this kind may be given us; and ſuch cannot be given by God, unleſs reveal'd; then the Matter of Revelation may be in ſome reſpects different from the Matter of Natural Religion. If the one may contain Points not contained under the other, it is evident beyond Diſpute, that the one may ſo far differ from the other; or, to vary the Expreſſion a little, That Natural and Reveal'd Religion are not neceſſarily one and the ſame. Thus far I think it clear they may be different: Whether they really are ſo or not, is another Queſtion, and to be determined by other Arguments.

To

To which Purpoſe I ſhall obſerve,

1. That it might on ſeveral Accounts be expected, if God ſhould ever vouchſafe us a Revelation of his Will, it would contain in it ſome Matters of a poſitive Nature; and conſequently, ſuch as are not Matters of Natural Religion. And,

2. That every Revelation, whether real or pretended, which hath ever been offered us, hath actually and in fact contained ſuch Points.

As to the former, I muſt obſerve, That if God ſhould ever vouchſafe us any Revelation of his Will, it might reaſonably be preſum'd his firſt Care would be to impreſs on Men's Minds a deep Senſe of this fundamental Point, *viz.* of his own ſupreme Dominion and Authority over us. His Right to give us any Commands at all muſt be built on this; and therefore a quick Senſe of it is by no Means a ſlight Matter, but a Point of the utmoſt Importance to us. But how may this be done moſt effectually? By preſcribing nothing but Matters of a purely moral Nature? This ſurely cannot be maintained on our Author's Principles, who aſſerts in ſome Places, that Matters of this Kind being excellent in themſelves, are equally obligatory, whether God ſhall command them or no. If this be true, and Men are really obliged to certain Actions from the Nature of Things, without conſidering

ſidering them as the Will of God, I cannot for my Life ſee how the Performance of them is any Expreſſion of our Obedience to him. How do we expreſs any Regard to his Authority, or acknowledge his Dominion at all, whilſt in every Article we perform nothing, which we were not equally concerned to perform, and which we would not equally have perform'd, tho' God ſhould be ſuppoſed entirely unconcerned about it?

The Caſe indeed is ſomewhat different upon my Principles. I have endeavoured to deduce all moral Obligation from the Will of God. On this Foot virtuous Performances will be Acts of Obedience to him; and conſequently, Acknowledgments of his Authority. But then, as our Obligation, ſtrictly ſpeaking, muſt be built on the Will of God, ſo a Senſe of his Authority muſt be impreſſed on us in the firſt Place; otherwiſe we ſhall perform Acts of moral Virtue upon Principles which will not make them Inſtances of Obedience; we ſhall perform them merely, becauſe we like to do ſo; and if we lik'd to do the contrary, we might as eaſily be led to do it. Now, as in Commands purely poſitive, we have none other Reaſon to determine us, but the Will of the wiſe Preſcriber, ſo by our Obedience we do the moſt fully expreſs our Senſe of his Authority. To give Men ſuch Commands therefore, is a proper Tryal or Exerciſe of their Obedience; it

ſerves

ſerves to impreſs on them, and to cultivate in them a Senſe of God's ſupreme Authority: And conſequently, as ſomething of this Kind is expedient in order to lay the Foundation of our Obedience more firmly, ſo it might be preſumed, if God ſhould ever vouchſafe us a Revelation of his Will, ſome Precepts of this Nature would be given us.

It will be vain to alledge, That this is to command for commanding Sake, and to deprive Men of their Liberty without any View, End or Reaſon whatſoever. This is frequently affirm'd by our Author; but with how little Juſtice, we ſhall ſee immediately. Thus much indeed muſt be own'd (and I have noted it heretofore) that as the Matter of ſuch poſitive Commands muſt be in its own Nature indifferent, ſo there can be no ſuch Reaſon for the particular Command, which ſhall make it abſolutely neceſſary to be given; yet ſtill, there may be a general Reaſon why ſomething of this Kind ſhould be injoined. And for this it would be ſufficient to alledge, had we nothing elſe to offer, That whilſt it exerciſes our Obedience, it cultivates in our Minds a Senſe of the Divine Authority. This ſurely is an End not unworthy of Regard. For tho' the Act preſcribed be in itſelf indifferent, yet the Obedience ſhewn by performing it is moral, and the End promoted by the Exerciſe of this Obedience excellent. It habituates

ates us to a Senſe of our abſolute Dependance on the ſupreme Being; and conſequently, hath a general Influence on the Practice of all our religious Duties.

A ſecond Reaſon why we might reaſonably expect, if God ſhould grant us Revelation, it would contain ſome Matters of a poſitive Kind, ſhall be This; Precepts of this Nature may ſerve to promote the Uniformity and better Order of outward Religion. What I deſign in this Place, hath a principal Regard to religious Worſhip; which, however plain and certain a Duty it may be in general, yet the particular Manner of performing it, cannot be ſo eaſily determined, if at all.

I am not here concerned about the ſeveral inward Acts of Devotion. Theſe may be diſcovered by human Reaſon in the ſame Way that the Neceſſity of Devotion in general is diſcovered. The Point at preſent is of a different Nature. It relates to the outward Forms and Rites of Worſhip. To determine theſe is ſurely a Matter of ſome Conſequence: And tho' it ſhould be ſuppoſed, that there are various Ways in which they may be determined with equal Advantage; and conſequently, that it is in itſelf indifferent which Way they be determined; yet it is by no means indifferent whether they be at all determined any way.

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It hath been obſerved under the former Chapter, that publick Worſhip cannot be performed without ſome Rites and Ceremonies: To which I ſhall add here, that Order and Decency muſt require likewiſe, that the ſame Ceremonies ſhould be obſerv'd by all; at leaſt, where ſeveral Perſons are at the ſame Time, and jointly concerned in the ſame Kind of Worſhip. This is ſo very apparent, that I ſhall not give myſelf the Trouble of a Proof: For to aſſert the contrary, is to maintain, either that Uniformity doth not contribute to Order, or that Order is of no Conſequence in the publick Worſhip of God. He who can diſpute either of theſe Points is not to be argued with. Now if this be allowed, then there ought to be ſome Rule, which all who join themſelves in publick Worſhip are concerned to follow; and how ſuch a Rule may be ſufficiently eſtabliſhed, is the Queſtion.

Our Author perhaps will tell us, That the Fitneſs of the Thing is the Rule; and farther, that this Rule is enforced on us by our common Reaſon. Very well: But then it deſerves to be conſidered at the ſame time, that there may be ſeveral Rites equally ſuitable to the Worſhip we are to perform. If this ſhall prove the Caſe, the Fitneſs of the Thing can be no Rule at all; for where ſeveral Things are equally fit, there it is impoſſible to make a Choice from the mere Con-

Conſideration of Fitneſs; and conſequently, we muſt have Recourſe to ſomething elſe in order to fix and determine us.

If our Author ſhall reply, That in Caſes where it is entirely indifferent what Men chuſe, each Man hath a Right to determine for himſelf; This might be ſaid with ſome Shew, were the Thing of private Concern. But as we are now ſpeaking, not concerning the Rites of private Worſhip, but of publick, ſo I conceive the Caſe is widely different: For, in this Caſe Uniformity requires that the Rites uſed by different Perſons ſhould be the ſame: But can Uniformity be maintained on this Foot? Or rather, were every Thing left to private Choice, would there not be almoſt as many different Rites as there are different Men?

Or, if to guard againſt this Inconvenience it be affirm'd, that ſuch Matters ought to be determined by our Superiors; I muſt ſo far agree as to allow, that this may properly be done, where nothing of this Kind is determined by any higher Power. But then it ſhould be remembred, that if Determinations may be made, and Things of this Nature may be preſcribed to us by our Superiors, ſurely God hath an equal Right to do the ſame: And if it be upon ſeveral Accounts fit and proper that ſuch Matters ſhould be determin'd, I cannot ſee why God may not as reaſonably determine them as Man; eſpe-

eſpecially ſince the Divine Authority is much more indiſputable, and ſuch, as muſt (if Men are thoroughly perſuaded of its being Divine) have an infinitely greater Weight with them.

I am aware it will be alledged (for it hath ſeveral Times been ſuggeſted to us by this very Writer) That eternal Diſputes may ariſe about Poſitive Injunctions; — That almoſt all the Quarrels which have ever been about religious Matters have ariſen from hence; — That theſe have given Birth to Perſecution and Cruelty, and to almoſt every Calamity which can happen. From whence our Author would have it concluded, that every Thing of this kind ſhould be thrown entirely out of Religion; and that the ſupreme Being cannot interpoſe in an Affair, where his very Interpoſition muſt prejudice the Ends of Religion itſelf. As I have not taken Notice of this Objection any where elſe, I ſhall deſire Leave to offer ſome Remarks on it here.

It is aſſerted in the Objection, that almoſt all the Quarrels which have ever happen'd about religious Matters, have related to things purely Poſitive, and ariſen from the Determinations given concerning them. But then I muſt deſire to know, how, and by what Means have they ariſen? From their being really made and given us by God? This ought to be intended in the Ob-

Objection; For if any thing elſe be meant by it, the Divine Interpoſition in Matters of this Nature is not affected in the leaſt. But this is ſo far from being true, that ſuch Quarrels have ever ariſen from God's Determinations, that had Matters been ſo determin'd, and acknowledg'd on all hands to have been ſo, no Quarrels could probably have ariſen about them. For, however Men may frequently neglect things which they acknowledge to be their Duty, it is ſcarce ever ſeen that they directly and obſtinately oppoſe them. It ſeems rather that the Conſequences above-mention'd are owing to the Want of a divine Determination. For if That would probably have compoſed Matters, the Calamities inſiſted on are not the Effects of Divine Determination, but Human.

The Truth of the Caſe is plainly this: In order to enforce poſitive Injunctions more ſtrongly on the World, Thoſe who had not Credit or Power enough of their own to influence Mankind, have pretended to a Divine Authority, which they really wanted. Such Pretences, we may eaſily imagine, would ſometimes be oppoſed with Vigour; and by how much the more they were oppoſed on the one hand, by ſo much the more eagerly would they be contended for by the oppoſite Party. Hence 'tis that ſuch Quarrels have ariſen. Thoſe who had no ſufficient Authority of their own, were reſolved to carry

carry their Point by bringing God into the Queſtion. The Conſequence of this is plain enough. Nothing could be expected to ariſe, but bitter Animoſity, Perſecution, Cruelty, with every thing elſe which might ſerve to ſupport a weak and unjuſtifiable Cauſe. But muſt this be charged to the Account of Divine Poſitive Injunctions? Is it not owing entirely to the Wickedneſs of Men, who have many times profan'd God's Name, by making him the Author of ſuch things as have been the Effects of their own Folly? The Objection then amounts to this, and this only; God cannot give us any Poſitive Precepts, however ſerviceable the giving them may prove to us,——becauſe wicked Men have ſometimes pretended his Authority,——have preſcrib'd the moſt trifling and ridiculous Things,---and enforc'd them on the World by all the Methods of Cruelty and Terror: Or, if you pleaſe, There can be no good Coin, nor any Authority any where lodg'd of making it current,----becauſe, this may ſometimes be counterfeited, and the Publick ſuffer by the Artifice of Impoſtors.

But to return to the direct Proof of the Point before me. I have obſerved, that the Decency and Order of religious Worſhip ſeem to require ſome Poſitive Inſtitutions: ——That if nothing of this kind be preſcribed by God, it muſt be done, either by each Man diſtinctly by himſelf; or elſe, by

our lawful Superiors. I have obſerved farther, that if Matters of this kind were entirely referr'd to each Man's private Diſcretion, there would probably be almoſt as many different Rites as there are different Men: The Conſequence muſt be, not only the Deſtruction of Decency and Order, but likewiſe of publick and joint Worſhip itſelf; For, Men cannot be ſaid to perform thoſe Offices jointly, in which they are found almoſt entirely to differ from each other. Nor can this be done ſo advantageouſly by our Superiors; not only, becauſe their Authority, in Matters of this kind, will be ſometimes queſtion'd, and conſequently be ſo far ineffectual,———but likewiſe, becauſe the Exerciſe of ſuch a Power muſt be liable to all thoſe Errors, to which Human Nature itſelf is ſubject. I think we may fairly conclude from hence, that in Matters which have ſo immediate a Regard to God himſelf, He would interpoſe, and give Men ſome Directions, if He ſhould ever interpoſe in an extraordinary Way at all;——That He would ſettle certain Matters at leaſt in the Ceremonial of his own Worſhip; and afford his Creatures the Satisfaction of thinking, that whilſt they addreſs themſelves to him, they do it in that way, which is upon all Accounts the beſt, becauſe preſcribed by that very Being they worſhip.

3. To

3. To what hath been already offer'd I ſhall add a Third Argument, *viz.* We might reaſonably expect ſome Poſitive Inſtitutions, if God ſhould ever reveal himſelf at all, for the better Promotion of inward and ſincere Piety. I do ſuppoſe here, that inward and ſincere Piety is the Thing which renders Men acceptable to God; and proportionably as they make greater Advances and Improvements this Way, ſo ſhall they obtain greater Degrees of Favour. This, doubtleſs, muſt be the main Point aim'd at by a Wiſe and Good Being, whenever He makes any extraordinary Manifeſtations of himſelf. A Revelation therefore cannot be deſigned merely to lay greater Burthens upon us; It muſt be intended to give us a more exact, perfect, and diſtinct View of what is fit and proper to be done;——To enforce the Rule more ſtrongly;——To recommend it more powerfully; and to put us in a better way, not only of acting, but likewiſe of cultivating thoſe Habits and Diſpoſitions, which are of a moral or religious Nature.

Now there are Two Ways eſpecially in which Poſitive Inſtitutions may be, in this reſpect, ſerviceable.

1. By guarding us againſt ſuch Temptations as we may not be able to conquer eaſily. And,

2. By ſuggeſting to our Minds ſuch Sentiments as are of a moral or religious Nature.

If there are certain Things which have been generally abuſed, and human Frailty is ſuch, that it cannot well be expected but they will be abuſed; an Injunction that Men ſhould abſtain entirely from theſe things is by no means improper. And yet, if the Abuſe be not abſolutely unavoidable, the Injunction will not be abſolutely neceſſary; and conſequently, if any thing of this kind ſhould ever be given us, it muſt be Poſitive; there being nothing in the nature of Things which can make an Abſtinence of this kind univerſally incumbent on us. In Matters of a Civil Nature we expect ſuch Directions from a Wiſe and Good Governour. Why therefore might not the like be hoped for from the All-wiſe Governour of the World, ſhould the Circumſtances of Things make them fit and proper to be given? This Remark will ſufficiently juſtify ſeveral Inſtitutions in the Law of *Moſes*; which being delivered to a particular People, and intended to guard them againſt ſuch Errors as they were more eſpecially expos'd to, are of ſuch a Nature as might reaſonably be expected, ſhould God ever reveal to them any Laws at all.

But the main Thing I would chuſe to obſerve here, is, the Uſefulneſs of certain Inſtitutions, as they are capable of ſuggeſting to our Minds ſuch Sentiments as are of a moral or religious Nature. Such Helps as theſe

would indeed be needleſs, if Men were perfect either as to their intellectual or moral Capacities; if they were patient to attend, and quick to diſcern the Fitneſs and Reaſon of Things; if they were always mindful of what they once knew; if they were diſpos'd of themſelves to diſcharge their Duty when known; and, laſtly, if no foreign Temptations were apt to draw them off from their good Purpoſes. But this is far from being the preſent State and Condition of Human Nature. Men are unapt to think and conſider ſufficiently; They are heedleſs, forgetful; expoſed to numberleſs Temptations; and, which is worſe, they are exceeding liable to be ſeduced by them. In this View of things we need not only a Syſtem of moral Precepts to direct us, but likewiſe a Scheme of moral Diſcipline, by which theſe Precepts may be rendered more effectual. This we cannot ſo well fix and ſettle for ourſelves. Every one cannot ſo eaſily diſcern the remote Influence of certain Things on their Virtue; or, if they could, yet they would not think themſelves concerned to practiſe Matters which are not direct Inſtances of Virtue. Beſides, that many Things receive a Uſefulneſs this way from the mere Will of the Inſtitutor. Something of this Kind is apparent even in civil Matters. The Seal is a Token of Confirmation, which receives its Signification not from any thing in its own Nature, but

only the Appointment of Laws. So likewiſe certain Things may be preſcribed by the Supreme Being, as Hints and Intimations of our Duty; which being ſo preſcribed, ſhall obtain a Signification, and, in their Uſe, ſuggeſt thoſe Reflections which are of the higheſt moral Importance.

Shall any one then affirm, that Matters of this Nature are utterly unworthy of God; ——that becauſe they may not be in themſelves excellent, they muſt therefore be entirely uſeleſs;——that as ſuch, they muſt be excluded out of Religion; and that God himſelf cannot impoſe them? This Concluſion is ſo abſolutely wrong, and judg'd to be ſo by all Mankind, that no Religion hath ever yet ſubſiſted, whether really or pretendedly reveal'd, which hath not contain'd in it ſomething of this Nature.

The firſt, and indeed the only reveal'd Precept which *Moſes* repreſents as given to our firſt Parents, in the very State of Innocence, was of a Poſitive Kind; from the Violation of which, Sin entered into the World, and Death by Sin. And in thoſe Manifeſtations which are ſaid to have been afterwards made to the Patriarchs, we find the ſame. *Noah* and *Abraham* are Inſtances of this, too well known to be diſputed. As to the Law delivered to the *Jews*, the Matter is ſo very plain, that one Objection which our Author hath ſuggeſted to the Diſadvantage

of that Law is built on this very Conſideration: And in Reference to Chriſtianity, I need not prove, what every Chriſtian who knows his Religion at all, acknowledges. This Gentleman may, if he pleaſes, diſpute whether any Thing of this Kind ought originally to have been preſcribed by our Religion; but, whether it actually hath been ſo or not, cannot ſure be queſtion'd. Amongſt the ſeveral Religions of the ancient *Gentiles*, doth it appear that there was ever any One of them, which did not preſcribe ſome Matters Poſitive, if thoſe Matters may be allowed to be Poſitive, which are not founded on the moral Reaſons of Things? In Truth, they carried Matters of this Kind into Extremes; and whilſt they pretended to ſupport Religion, they injur'd it: For, they not only over-burthen'd true Piety by too numerous Ceremonies, but frequently preſcrib'd ſuch as were really inconſiſtent with it. Yet in theſe Things the greateſt Part of the Religion they taught conſiſted. They imagin'd that ſcarce any Thing elſe was pleaſing to God: And in this they agreed entirely in the general, however they might differ from each other as to the particular Ceremonies they practiſed. To come down lower; Do we not ſee the ſame in the Religion of *Mahomet*? And do not all the Accounts given us, concerning the ſeveral Religions profeſs'd amongſt the Heathens to this Day,

confirm it likewiſe? This is ſo well known, that as I would not trouble the Reader with needleſs Proofs, ſo I preſume our Author, who complains ſo much of the Superſtition of Mankind, will not expect it. How much ſoever we may differ from each other in our Sentiments on other Points, yet I flatter my ſelf we ſhall eaſily agree in this Point of Fact.

But if this once be admitted, then I muſt demand of this Gentleman, whether any One of all theſe ſeveral Religions did really proceed from God in the Way of Revelation? If he ſhall anſwer me in the Affirmative, then the Point I have been hitherto contending for, is allowed me; and certain Things may be, and actually are Matters of Reveal'd Religion, which do not belong to Natural. But, if on the other hand, he ſhall anſwer in the Negative (as the main Deſign of his Book manifeſtly ſhews he muſt) then I may draw an Argument from the Concurrence of Mankind in this one general Point, notwithſtanding their wide Difference from each other in Particulars; and ſet the united Opinion of the World in all Ages of it, againſt the particular Opinion of this ſingle Gentleman. Be it (as this Gentleman is diſpoſed to think) that thoſe who have profeſſed any of theſe ſeveral Religions, have either forged them, or given too eaſy Credit to Forgeries; yet ſtill their Opinion, that Poſitive

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Precepts might proceed from God, is clear and manifeſt. Had they thought otherwiſe, or had this Point been ſo plainly demonſtrable in the Negative, as our Author would have us believe, would every one of thoſe who pretended to teach a Religion as from God, have run into this Blunder? Would he have impoſed Things on the World as the Will of God, of which he was not only conſcious that they had no ſuch Foundation, but which he knew God could not poſſibly be the Anthor of; nay, which were ſo plainly contrary to his Will, that he could not expect but the Forgery muſt betray it ſelf? Wiſe and crafty Men do not act in this Manner: And therefore we muſt conclude, that the mixing ſome Poſitive Precepts with other Matters in Religion, was what all the World preſum'd would be the Caſe, ſhould God ever reveal himſelf at all: Otherwiſe ſuch Impoſtors would not have run the Riſque; or if they had, they could not always have ſucceeded; Some Religion or other would have ſubſiſted without any Inſtitutions, at leaſt without ſuch as were pretended to have come from God.

Thus I have, in this Place, carried the Point with regard to poſitive Precepts ſomewhat farther than I did in the laſt Chapter. All that I contended for under that Head, was, That ſuch Precepts might be given us, and that our Author's Objections to the con-

trary were inconcluſive. Here I have not only inſiſted that ſuch Precepts may be given us, but endeavoured to ſhew likewiſe, that ſome ſuch might reaſonably be expected, if God ſhould ever reveal himſelf at all; and this I have ſupported from the Reaſon of the Thing, and the concurrent Senſe of Mankind in all Ages of the World. If this Arguing be juſt, then it follows clearly, That Natural and Reveal'd Religion are Not neceſſarily one and the ſame, but that certain Points may, and probably would become Matter of the one, which do not at all belong to the other.

But what then, it will be perhaps be ſaid; Is this the whole in which Reveal'd Religion differs from Natural? Is it worthy the extraordinary Interpoſition of an all-wiſe Being to preſcribe thoſe Things, which by being indifferent, might as well have been let alone? Is this all the Perfection which Reveal'd Religion hath above Natural, That it makes ſome Things neceſſary to be done or avoided by us, which have no Excellency in themſelves, and therefore cannot contribute to the Excellency of Religion? At this Rate Men might as well have been left to themſelves.

In Reply to which, I muſt obſerve, That Poſitive Inſtitutions, conſidered either as Marks of God's Authority, and of our Dependance on him;——or, as Determinations of ſomething proper to be determined in the

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Exerciſe of our outward Piety; —— or, as Means whereby inward Religion is cultivated and improved, are not Matters of ſuch ſlight Importance as the Objection ſuppoſes; and therefore, upon Suppoſition that the ſeveral Particulars of inward Religion were ſo clear and indiſputable, as to need no farther Manifeſtation, yet ſtill theſe Aids and Aſſiſtances for the more orderly and better Practice of it would not be Matters unworthy of the Divine Care. The Things preſcrib'd, tho' allow'd to be indifferent in ſuch a Senſe, that they were not originally neceſſary, nor Matters of natural Duty, yet might not, (as the Objection affirms,) be as well let alone, if there are any real Uſes of them, or Advantages to be obtained by them: And Things which have no Excellency in themſelves, and therefore are not excellent in an *abſolute* Senſe, may yet have a *relative* Excellency; and when conſidered in this View, may contribute to the Excellency of that Scheme, the Deſign of which is not only to teach us the beſt Precepts, but to accommodate them to the preſent Condition of Man. Upon this State of the Matter it will appear, that Poſitive Precepts may very fitly be given us by God; and that it is not, and cannot be quite as well for us to be left entirely to ourſelves.

However, I muſt deſire not to be miſunderſtood here. I do by no Means affirm, that

that This is the Whole in which Natural and Reveal'd Religion differ from each other. There are other Articles of much higher Importance, to which we are concerned to attend carefully, in order to have a full View of this Matter.

It ſhould be remembred then, that human Reaſon, even in its beſt State, is imperfect: And tho' it muſt be allowed, that nothing can be, ſtrictly ſpeaking, a natural Duty, which is not diſcoverable by natural Reaſon, yet there may be ſeveral other Matters of Conſequence to be known; Things which would contribute highly to our Perfection, and conſequently, to our Happineſs. Now, if a Revelation, I mean, a Revelation of a Rule of Life, ſhould be given us, it would ſurely include ſome Matters either not knowable at all on any other Suppoſition, or at leaſt not knowable in the ſame Degrees of Clearneſs and Perfection: And if theſe ſhould become Parts of it, then there will be a main Difference between them as to the Subject of each, over and above the particular Ways of conveying this Knowledge.

Thus, if there be any References or Relations of the Supreme Being to us, beſides thoſe which our Reaſon teaches from the Certainty of Creation and Providence, it may be of Importance to us to know theſe Relations: A Fitneſs of certain Actions may reſult from them; and the Knowledge of

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ſuch Relations may ſhew them to be God's Will, and bind them on us as Duties. Or, if our Reaſon ſhould be ſo weak as not to make out exactly the ſeveral Dependencies of one Thing upon another, and to trace out the Fitneſs of Things in a long Courſe of Reaſoning (which is the Caſe, I will not ſay barely of the Generality in many Things, but of All in ſome) a Divine Revelation may remedy theſe Imperfections; —— may either ſhew, how theſe Deductions may be made, mark out the ſeveral Steps, and ſettle Matters on their proper Principles; —— or elſe, (which is to us the ſame) may enforce on us the Concluſion as the Will of God, without pointing out the Reaſon of the Thing at all. Is not this then deſirable? And would not a ſerious Perſon, who thinks himſelf concerned to act what is fit and proper, wiſh, that where his own natural Diſcernment fails him, he might be inform'd ſome other Way? If this be the Caſe, then ſomething of this Kind might be hoped for, if God ſhould ever vouchſafe us a Revelation; and this is ſo entirely agreeable to his Attributes, that I cannot ſee how any one, who hath a due Senſe of them, can diſpute it. Here then are two Particulars more, in which Reveal'd Religion might differ from Natural, and probably would do ſo, *viz.* As to Principles or Doctrines not diſcoverable by natural Light; and likewiſe as to Precepts, which

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tho' founded in the Reaſon of Things, yet are not knowable in the Uſe of our Reaſon.

Or, if theſe Matters are, or may be known by us in ſome Meaſure, whilſt we uſe the Faculties given us; yet poſſibly the Knowledge, in this Way attainable, may be difficult to be gain'd; may be ſhort and imperfect; may be in ſeveral Reſpects indiſtinct. In ſuch a Caſe Revelation may make Matters eaſy; may ſave us the Pains of hard Study, and long Deduction; may clear up Things farther than our natural Reaſon may be able to do; in ſhort, may ſet them in a fuller View, and a ſtronger Light. Let this then be the Caſe; Will not Reveal'd Religion differ from Natural, ſomewhat more than barely the Manner of making Things known to us? Will it not likewiſe differ in the Degree and Perfection of that Knowledge which is acquired? Admitting that the heavenly Bodies may be viewed by the naked Eye, yet will the Uſe of Teleſcopes diſcover nothing farther? And ſhall any one aſſert, that becauſe theſe Bodies may be diſcerned, in ſome Sort, both Ways, therefore the Diſcoveries made in each differ none otherwiſe than as to the particular Methods of making them? This Inſtance is exactly ſimilar to the former; and therefore, the ſame Judgment muſt be paſſed on both.

To go on; Tho' it might, from conſidering the Nature of Things, be known, that a certain Courſe of Life is fit and proper, and upon that account the Will of God, yet ſtill there is ſomething farther neceſſary in order to influence our Actions. As there are Temptations to be combated, and many Difficulties in a virtuous Courſe to be overcome, ſo it is neceſſary that there ſhould be ſomething more to move us than the mere Reaſon of the Thing, or Beauty of Virtue. For, let us ſuppoſe, that theſe Conſiderations are ſufficient to determine a reaſonable Being, yet what if Men are not diſpos'd to attend to Reaſon; what if we ſubſiſt in a corrupted State, and under a wrong Biaſs? Then ſomething elſe may be needful to keep them within proper Bounds.

It muſt be confeſſed indeed, that Natural Reaſon may give us ſome Relief here. What God wills, muſt be approved and rewarded by him; and that which is inconſiſtent with his Will, muſt be condemn'd and puniſhed in the Doer. This is certain in the general; and every Man is capable of getting ſome Light into it. But yet, as 'tis neceſſary, in order to diſcern this Matter fully, that Men ſhould be able to think cloſely, and to purſue an Argument thro' a long Chain of Reaſoning; ſo the Generality of Mankind cannot carry it ſo far, as it may per-

perhaps, in the Nature of Timgs, be carry'd. Or, if they ſhould be able to do this, yet the whole Amount of their Diſcoveries will be, that ſomething Good or Ill ſhall await us, as the Reward or Puniſhment of our Behaviour: But What, or When, or Where; —— Theſe are Matters which human Reaſon cannot at all reach to. A Revelation therefore, in this Caſe, may diſcover ſomething more than Natural Religion teaches; and conſequently, upon this View of the Matter, may be more full and extenſive than mere Natural Religion is, or can be.

I might obſerve farther, That as Natural Religion preſcribes to us certain Duties; and may give us ſome Aſſurance of Acceptance with God upon the Performance of theſe Duties; ſo, if we violate them, it muſt leave us under That Sentence, which our Sins deſerve. For we neither do, nor can poſſibly know for certain, in the mere Uſe of our Reaſon, how far God will remit thoſe Puniſhments we have incurr'd. But yet, God may make known to us his intended Proceedings in this Caſe by Revelation; which, if he ſhould do, another Article of Difference will ariſe, and that of the utmoſt Conſequence, to have ſome Aſſurance in: For certainly nothing can be more deſireable than to have ſome Light into an Affair, in which we are concern'd ſo deeply, and by which

which our Conduct in our future Courſe will be ſo greatly influenced. In theſe, as well as ſome other Particulars, which have been ſuggeſted heretofore, Reveal'd Religion may differ from Natural; and in theſe it might be expected it would differ, if God ſhould ever grant us a Revelation. We may conclude therefore, that they are ſo far from being neceſſarily One and the Same, as This Gentleman contends, that the contrary is true; a very important Difference in the Matter of each being in ſeveral reſpects fit and proper.

But, when I aſſert a Difference between theſe two Laws, both which muſt be the Will of the ſame infinitely Wiſe and Gracious Governor, I do not mean by it a Difference of *Oppoſition*, or, that the one ſhall really contradict and deſtroy the other. This muſt not be affirm'd by any means. What is, in its Nature, fit and proper, muſt be agreeable to the Will of God: What is, in its Nature, unfit and improper, muſt be diſagreeable thereto: And theſe, as far as they are diſcoverable by us in the Uſe of Reaſon, and conſider'd as the Divine Command, conſtitute the Law, or Religion of Nature. This Law, (as I have allow'd heretofore) is immutable, in ſuch a Senſe, that all Circumſtances continuing the ſame, the Fitneſs the ſame, and the Knowledge of that Fitneſs the ſame likewiſe, it muſt perpetually oblige.

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It is very true therefore, as our Author hath maintain'd, " that Reveal'd Religion " cannot command what Natural Religion " forbids; nor, on the other hand, can it " forbid what that commands." p. 67. From hence it follows, that their Precepts muſt be entirely conſiſtent with each other; and tho' in ſome reſpects different, yet in none *contrary*.

I do maintain likewiſe, that the ſeveral Precepts of Natural Religion, muſt be either ſuppos'd or expreſs'd in Reveal'd; and conſequently, will thus far become Parts of it, and be confirm'd by it. So far as this They are One and the ſame: One, as a Part is One with the Whole, which includes that Part in it; and different, as a Whole is different from a ſingle Part, to which, by the Superaddition of other Parts, it becomes a Whole.

But ſuch a Difference as this, our Author tells us, will amount to an Oppoſition: and his Argument is this; That the Law of Nature being of a certain Extent, whatſoever is not contain'd under it, either as commanded or forbidden, muſt be indifferent; and conſequently, what God, by this Law, leaves us at Liberty about. If therefore any thing ſhall afterwards be required or forbidden by Revelation, which was not ſo determin'd by the Law of Nature, this will be a reſtraining our Liberty, and a Contradiction

diction to that Part of the Law of Nature which before allow'd it. See our Author's own Words: "To ſuppoſe that God, by "the Law of Nature, leaves Men at Li- "berty in all indifferent Things; and yet, "by a poſitive Law, reſtrains this Liberty "in certain Parts and Ages of the World, "is to ſuppoſe God determines one Way by "immediate, and another Way by mediate "Revelation; both Laws too ſubſiſting at "the ſame Time." p. 134.

This is an Argument ſo much out of the Way, and of ſo little Force, that I am really ſurpriz'd it ſhould proceed from our Author, who is capable of ſaying Things which have a much better Shew of Reaſoning. It will not be expected that I ſhould ſeriouſly reply to ſuch Arguing as this. It will be ſufficient juſt to obſerve, that upon this Foot, every new Law, enacted by the Civil Power, is an Oppoſition to, and a Subverſion of the Laws before ſubſiſting; and this notwithſtanding it ſhould only ſupply their Defects, and carry on the ſame End with them: For, in this Caſe likewiſe a Liberty allow'd by the preceding Laws, is reſtrain'd by the ſucceeding; and conſequently, as our Author expreſſes it, the Law-giver determines one Way by one Set of Laws, and another Way by another; both too ſubſiſting at the ſame Time. Yet he ſcarce expects by ſuch kind of Objections to

wreſt from The Supreme Power the Authority of making new Laws; nor will He, I believe, affirm, That every new Act is virtually a Repeal of all thoſe which were ever made before.

Be it then, that foraſmuch as Natural Religion muſt, one Way or other, be contained under Reveal'd; —— muſt be either ſuppos'd or expreſs'd in it, and confirm'd by it, and, ſo far as this, One with it: Be it, that *Chriſtianity* is in this reſpect, *a Republication of the Law of Nature*, and conſequently, ſo far as this Matter of it reaches, *as Old as the Creation*; yet what will all this avail, if allow'd, as allow'd indeed it muſt be? We contend, that altho' it be a Republication of the Law of Nature, yet it may be, and actually is, ſomething more; and that notwithſtanding this Unity in one reſpect, there is a Difference ſufficient between them in Others.

Natural and Reveal'd Religion, we arffim, differ in Extent. Under which Head we may reckon, 1. Principles, diſcover'd by Revelation, which are abſolutely undiſcoverable by natural Reaſon. 2. Precepts; ſome of which tho' founded on the Reaſons of Things, yet cannot be trac'd out by us in our preſent Circumſtances; and others God hath preſcribed to us, as Tokens of his Authority, —— for the Decency of his Worſhip, —— or, for the Increaſe and Advancement of inward Piety.

They differ again, in Point of Clearneſs, with reſpect to thoſe Things, which tho' diſcoverable in ſome ſort both Ways, are yet not ſo fully made known to us in the mere Uſe of Reaſon, as they are by expreſs Revelation from God: And tho' their Difference is not Such under this Article, as what we affirm'd under the former, yet it amounts to ſomewhat more than our Author allows, who hath contended that Natural and Reveal'd Religion differ only as to the manner of being communicated to us.

They differ, Laſtly in Efficacy; For Revelation eſtabliſhes ſuch Sanctions both of Reward and Puniſhment as mere human Reaſon could never diſcover; It gives us Aſſurance of full Pardon upon Repentance; and the Comfort of hoping for the Aids of the Holy Spirit in the Diſcharge of thoſe Things, which may otherwiſe prove too difficult for us, whether from the Urgency of Temptations, or the Infirmity of our Nature.

Theſe are ſuch important Articles of Difference, and ſo plainly viſible in the Chriſtian Scheme, that to deny there can be any Difference between Natural and Reveal'd Religion, is virtually a Denial of Revelation itſelf: And to affirm in the Groſs, and without any Diſtinction, that *Chriſtianity is as Old as the Creation*, is to affirm, that all which is proper and peculiar to Chriſtianity, and upon Account of which it paſſes under that Denomination, is groundleſs and an Impoſture; to affirm which,

is not only to make it Not as Old as the Creation, but to deny it any manner of Exiſtence as a real Religion at all.

To conclude this Head; If the Matter of Revelation may differ from the Matter of Natural Religion; —— If it may fairly be preſum'd that the Matter of each would differ in ſome ſort, if a Revelation ſhould be ever given us at all; —— If every Religion, which hath yet been offer'd to the World as Reveal'd, hath differ'd from Natural Religion; —— and if that in particular, which, upon the beſt Grounds imaginable, we receive as Reveal'd, doth actually contain ſome ſuch Articles of Difference; then, I conceive, Nothing farther need be offer'd in Diſproof of our Author's bold Aſſertions. I ſhall therefore paſs on to ſome other Points; and endeavour to ſupport, in the following Chapters, The Uſefulneſs, Expediency, and Reality of a Revelation againſt the Objections of This Gentleman.

CHAP.

CHAP. V.

Whether a proper Rule of Life be perfectly and eaſily diſcoverable by every Man, even by thoſe of the meaneſt Capacity.

THIS General Queſtion reſolves itſelf into theſe Two; *viz.* 1. Whether a proper Rule of Life be perfectly diſcoverable by every Man, *&c.* 2. Whether it be eaſily diſcoverable. Concerning both theſe ſomewhat hath been occaſionally obſerv'd before; But as the more full Diſcuſſion of theſe Queſtions belongs to this Place, I ſhall here purſue them.

Yet, before I proceed, one Thing muſt be noted carefully, namely, That I am not here debating concerning That Law, from which Duty, ſtrictly ſpeaking, ariſes, but that Rule of Fitneſs, which, if diſcover'd, and conſider'd as the Will of God, would conſtitute our Law. What each Man is properly oblig'd to in Point of Duty, is doubtleſs knowable by each Man. In this reſpect the very meaneſt hath a Sufficiency of Knowledge; and that

for the Reaſon formerly inſiſted on, That no one can be accountable for thoſe Things, which he is abſolutely incapable of knowing. But then, many Things may be fit and proper to be done, and therefore fall under That general Rule, which I call the proper Rule of Life, which yet may, on ſeveral Accounts, exceed the Diſcoveries of certain Perſons. This muſt be allow'd to be poſſible at leaſt, by thoſe who conſider Fitneſs as Something founded in the Natures of Things, and conſequently, as having no Relation to the Thoughts, and Apprehenſions of Men concerning it. But ſuppoſing this to be poſſible in Theory, yet whether it be Fact or no, is another Point, and the Queſtion which comes now to be conſider'd.

From the foregoing Diſtinction, carefully attended to, it will appear, that all ſuch Arguings as theſe are vain, " That if God hath given " Mankind a Law, He muſt have given them " ſufficient Means of knowing it: He would " otherwiſe have defeated his own Intention in " giving it." p. 3. " That as Men have no " other Faculties to judge with, [but their Rea- " ſon,] ſo their uſing theſe after the beſt manner " they can, muſt anſwer the End for which " God gave them, and juſtify their Conduct;--- " That if God will judge all Mankind as they " are accountable, *i. e.* as they are rational, " the Judgment muſt hold an exact Proportion " to the Uſe they make of their Reaſon, and

" it

" it would be in vain to uſe it, if the due Uſe " of it would not juſtify them before God. " p. 5, 6. All theſe, and ſuch like Arguings, are nothing at all to the Purpoſe. For, What if Men, by doing their Beſt, may be juſtify'd; or, rather, if you pleaſe, What if upon this Suppoſition they cannot be condemn'd in Equity? Doth this prove at all, that every Thing, in its own Nature fitting, is therefore knowable, by every Man? And if this be not knowable by every Man, in the Uſe of his Reaſon, then a Revelation may be exceedingly ſerviceable in order to make it ſo. The Terms *Law* and *Duty* ought not to mix themſelves in the Queſtion before us. The Point at preſent is, Not whether every Man is capable of knowing all that He is ſtrictly oblig'd to, —— but, whether every Man hath Abilities and Opportunities ſufficient for diſcovering every thing which may be fit and proper to be done. And that our Author thinks every Man, even thoſe of the loweſt Parts, and meaneſt Capacities, are capable of doing this, will, I conceive appear from ſeveral Paſſages of his Book; tho' He hath ſtudy'd Confuſion ſo much, and expreſs'd himſelf in ſo odd a Manner, that it may not be always eaſy to fix and ſettle his Meaning.

I have ſhewn heretofore, that however truly, in the Beginning of his Second Chapter, he defines The Law or Religion of Nature, yet he immediately deſerts his own Definition, and tells us, " that The Religion of " Nature takes in every thing, which is

" founded in the Nature and Reaſon of " Things. " It is on this foot he argues all throughout his Book: and therefore, whereever he ſpeaks of *Religion*, *True Religion*, *Natural Religion*, *Law of Nature*, *God's Law*, and the like, he muſt be underſtood to include under it, every Thing in itſelf fit and proper; or, what I have call'd above A proper Rule of Life. This being noted in order to underſtand what our Author means, I ſhall proceed to ſome of thoſe Paſſages, in which his Opinion on the preſent Point is repreſented to us.

To this Purpoſe he tells us, " that the " End for which God hath given us Reaſon, " is, to compare Things, and from thence " to judge concerning the Fitneſs or Unfitneſs " of Actions. And could not our Reaſon " judge ſoundly in all ſuch Matters, it could " not have anſwer'd the End for which Infi- " nite Wiſdom and Goodneſs beſtow'd that " excellent Gift, " *p.* 26. Here he claims to Human Reaſon an unlimited Extent, as to the Fitneſs or Unfitneſs of Actions. And tho' he aſſerts this to Human Reaſon in the general only, yet the Foundation of his Arguing will make it equally applicable to every Man's Reaſon. He builds his Argument on the End for which Human Reaſon was given us; which being the ſame in all, the ſame Privileges are virtually here aſſerted to all; and conſequently every Man, even thoſe of the meaneſt

meaneſt Abilities, muſt be (according to him) capable, as of comparing Things, and from thence judging concerning the Fitneſs or Unfitneſs of Actions, ſo likewiſe of judging ſoundly in all ſuch Matters. Again, "I "cannot help thinking, but (ſuch is the Di-"vine Goodneſs) God's Will is ſo clearly "and fully manifeſted in the Book of Na-"ture, that he who runs may read it. This "cannot be deny'd, if the Book of Nature "ſhews us, in Characters legible by the "whole World, the Relation we ſtand in to "God and our Fellow Creatures, and the "Duties reſulting from thence; for then it "muſt teach us the Whole of our Duty," p. 28. Once more; "'Tis impoſſible Men "ſhould have any juſt Idea of the Perfection "of God, who think that the Dictates of "Infinite Wiſdom do not carry their own "Evidence with them, and are not by their "own innate Worth diſcoverable to all Man-"kind," p. 125. The ſame is ſtill more explicitly ſet forth, p. 198. "Religion, "(which way ſoever reveal'd) carries ſuch "internal Marks of Truth, as at all Times "and Places ſhews itſelf, even to the meaneſt "Capacity, to be the Will of a Being of "univerſal and impartial Benevolence." I might ſupport the ſame by numberleſs other Paſſages to the ſame Purpoſe: But, if theſe are not thought ſufficient, I would refer the Reader to our Author's whole Courſe of argu-

arguing from p. 278, to p. 283. In Oppoſition to all which, I ſhall,

1. Shew directly, that a proper Rule of Life is not perfectly diſcoverable by every Man, even by thoſe of the meaneſt Capacity. And,

2. Examine what our Author hath advanced to the contrary.

As to the direct Proof of this Matter, we need go no farther than the common Experience of Mankind; for, I think, we may ſafely conclude ſomewhat concerning the Abilities of Men this way from conſidering what they have actually, and in fact done.

Now, is it ſeen that Men of the loweſt Rank as to intellectual Accompliſhments, have ſo perfect an Acquaintance with every Thing which is fit and proper to be done? Do they ſhew this upon every Occaſion? Have they ever drawn out any fine Syſtems of Morality? Or, does it appear from their Conduct, that they have ſo nice, quick, and perfect a Senſe of theſe Things? So far from it, that all other Circumſtances being alike, Men are more or leſs regular in their Conduct in proportion to the Degrees of their intellectual Capacity.

I deny not indeed, but the more general Points are knowable by every Man, even by thoſe of the meaneſt Parts: And unleſs they were ſo, Men could not be reckon'd Moral Agents;

Agents; and conſequently, would not properly come within the preſent Queſtion: But, to diſcern a Truth in the general; and to be capable either of applying it on every particular Occaſion, or of deducing from it all poſſible Concluſions, are quite different Things. The firſt Principles of all Sciences are ſelf-evident; and conſequently, ſuch as are knowable even by the meaneſt. This is eſpecially true in mathematical Knowledge. But what then? Is every Man a Mathematician? Or, hath every Man a Sufficiency of Natural Talents whereby to purſue theſe Principles thro' that infinite Variety of Concluſions, which skilful Perſons are able to draw from them? No certainly; And for the ſame Reaſon it cannot be concluded, that becauſe the fundamental Principles of Moral Knowledge are open to every Man, Therefore the Whole of Moral Science muſt be ſo likewiſe; or, that becauſe ſuch general Precepts as theſe, "God is to be honour'd, worſhipp'd, "and obey'd; —— We ought to do what "Good we can to all, and to abſtain from "offering Injury to any; —— We ought to "be temperate, ſober, chaſte, and the like;" —— I ſay, we cannot conclude, that becauſe ſuch Precepts as theſe may be ſuppos'd to be obvious, Therefore every thing elſe is clear, plain and eaſy.

Every one, who is at all acquainted with Books, knows what Reputation ſome few of the

the Philoſophers have obtain'd by their Moral Syſtems; tho', by the Way, there are many undeniable Defects in every one of them, and ſuch as we are now able to diſcern plainly by that Light which Chriſtianity hath given us. But, could this ever have happen'd, had the Subject of Morals been ſo exceedingly eaſy, that every Man, even the meaneſt, might make himſelf entirely Maſter of it? Was it ever ſeen that Men gain'd Credit by performing what every one elſe was able to perform as well as themſelves? On this Foot their Fame was purchas'd at an eaſy Rate indeed; and, for the future, we muſt rather admire their good Fortune, than their Merit. But whatever this Gentleman may advance, I cannot think their Reputation will be ſo eaſily overthrown. Their Works have hitherto maintain'd their Ground, and will do ſo, as long as Men have Senſe enough to diſcern what is great in others, or defective in themſelves.

In the laſt Century there aroſe a very extraordinary Genius for Philoſophical Speculations; I mean Mr. *Lock*, the Glory of that Age, and the Inſtructor of the preſent. This Gentleman had examin'd into the Nature and Extent of Human Underſtanding beyond any Perſon before him, and made ſuch Diſcoveries as have highly oblig'd the Curious. In the Courſe of his Enquiries it occurr'd to him, from conſidering the Nature of Moral Ideas, that *Ethicks* was capable of ſtrict Demonſtra-

monſtration, as well as Mathematicks. He well knew that The Great Maſters on the Subject of Morals had done little this Way; and preſum'd, (as well he might) that this had hitherto been thought impoſſible. "Yet, "ſays he, upon this Ground, (*viz.* the Prin- "ciples before advanc'd) I am bold to think "Morality is capable of Demonſtration, as "well as Mathematicks." (See his Eſſay, &c. L. 3. C. 11. §. 16.) See, however, with what Caution this Great Man maintains his Point! He doth not affirm by any means, that every Thing in Morality is capable of being demonſtrated; but only, (as he tells us afterwards, L. 4. C. 12. §. 8.) "I doubt not "but, if a right Method were taken, *a* "*great Part* of Morality might be made "out with that Clearneſs, that could leave, "to a conſidering Man, no more Reaſon to "doubt, than he could have to doubt of the "Truth of Propoſitions in Mathematicks, "which have been demonſtrated to him." Doth this look as if he imagin'd that every Man, even thoſe of the meaneſt Capacities, were thoroughly acquainted with every Thing on this Subject? If he thought ſo, why does he introduce it as a Diſcovery, that Morality is capable of Demonſtration? And whilſt he aſſerts this, Why doth he aſſert it with ſo much Reſerve and Caution? Why doth he extend the Aſſertion Not to the whole of Morality, but to a great Part of it only?

only? To this I muſt add farther, He doth not, in the laſt cited Paſſage, maintain, that every Man is capable, by his own Force, of demonſtrating whatſoever is really capable of being demonſtrated in Morality; but only, that if a right Method were taken, a great Part of Morality might be made out with that Clearneſs that could leave *to a conſidering Man* no more Reaſon to doubt, *&c.* —— To a conſidering Man, *i. e.* to one who is willing to attend, and hath Abilities to judge.

Mr. *Lock*'s Hints on this Subject were read with great Pleaſure by ſeveral ingenious Men: Mr. *Molineux*, in particular, was ſo highly delighted with them, that he could not forbear preſſing his Friend to purſue this Matter more diſtinctly, and to oblige us with a Body of Moral Philoſophy drawn up in the demonſtrative Way. But how did Mr. *Lock* reply to this? Why, in theſe Words, "Tho' by "the View I had of Moral Ideas whilſt I "was conſidering that Subject, I thought I "ſaw that Morality might be demonſtratively "made out, yet whether I am able to make "it out, is another Queſtion. Every one "could not have demonſtrated what Mr. "*Newton*'s Book hath ſhewn to be demon-"ſtrable." [*Lock*'s Familiar Letters, p. 10.] What then! Was this ſo difficult a Taſk to Mr. *Lock*, which yet the meaneſt, and moſt illiterate Mechanick is ſo entirely equal to? Or, did this accurate Reaſoner know ſo little

of

of his own Abilities, or judge ſo meanly of them, as to think himſelf ſcarce qualify'd to undertake what, it ſeems, every Man elſe was able to do with Eaſe? This ſurely cannot be ſaid. And therefore we muſt conclude, that whatever Abilities the Gentleman I am now contending with may enjoy, and how much ſoever he may be able to do to this Purpoſe, in the Uſe of his Natural Reaſon, yet every Man is not equally capable of doing the ſame. Mr. *Lock*, we ſee, would not attempt it; and therefore it muſt be vain for others, ſo very much inferior to this Great Man, to attempt it after him.

We have lately, indeed, had a Noble Performance much in the Way which Mr. *Lock* propos'd; and the Deſign hath been ſo well executed by Mr. *Woollaſton*, that however ſome Objections may be made againſt certain Parts of his Book, yet it hath been receiv'd, in the general, with the higheſt Applauſe. I believe it will be allow'd by every one, that This is the moſt compleat Syſtem of Moral Principles and Precepts, which hath been yet given us on the mere Foot of Natural Reaſon; tho' poſſibly ſome one or other may ariſe hereafter, and carry the Matter ſtill farther. But whence came it to paſs, that Mr. *Woollaſton* alone ſhould ſucceed ſo well, and go ſo far beyond his Predeceſſors on this Subject, if the Matter had indeed been ſo very plain and eaſy; "if God's Will, [*i. e.* what

"is

" is fit and proper] is ſo clearly and fully " manifeſted in the Book of Nature, that he " who runs may read it; " and if " Reli- " gion [another Word us'd by our Author " in the ſame Senſe;] if This, I ſay, carries " ſuch internal Marks of Truth, as at all " Times and Places plainly ſhews itſelf even " to the meaneſt Capacity, *&c.*? " Surely thoſe Perſons who have ſet ſo great a Value on Mr. *Woollaſton*'s Performance, have not miſtaken Matters ſo much, as to beſtow the higheſt Praiſe on him for doing what was in itſelf a mean and low Work, and what every other Perſon was capable of doing as well as He. Thus much I am ſure may be concluded from the general Applauſe with which this Gentleman's Book hath been receiv'd, that it was thought to contain ſomething extraordinary; which, if admitted, it muſt follow of Courſe, that this Propoſition, *viz.* A proper Rule of Life is perfectly diſcoverable even by thoſe of the meaneſt Capacities, is contrary to the common Senſe and Experience of the World.

Over and above this Argument drawn from Experience, I ſhall evince the ſame from the Nature and Reaſon of the Thing itſelf. The Propoſition affirm'd by our Author, is thus expreſs'd by him; " Religion " [or the proper Rule of Life] carries with " it ſuch internal Marks of Truth, as at all " Times and Places plainly ſhews itſelf even " to

"to the meaneſt Capacity, &c." I muſt charge this Propoſition with a clear and evident Contradiction; becauſe, if Religion [as he loves to expreſs himſelf] hath really ſuch internal Marks, as muſt make it plain and apparent to every Man, then all Men are equally capable of knowing every Thing this Way; and if this be admitted, there can be no ſuch Thing as greater or leſs Degrees of Capacity: How then can there be any Suppoſition made of the *meaneſt* Capacity? How can there be different Degrees with regard to a Point in which all are equal? Or, if it ſhall ſtill be maintain'd, that Capacity, in this reſpect, doth admit Degrees, then it is evident, that Some are capable of knowing more than Others: And if this be once allow'd, then How is every Man, even he who is ſuppoſed to have the meaneſt Capacity, able to diſcover every Thing? Turn it which Way you pleaſe: Either every Thing on the Subject we are now ſpeaking of, is not equally capable of being known by every one; —— or, if it be, there can be no ſuch thing as Degrees of Capacity: For theſe two are entirely inconſiſtent with each other.

But our Author will perhaps alledge, that the different Degrees of Capacity refer not to Matters of Morality, (in which reſpect Men are all equal) but to ſomething elſe, *viz.* to Men's general Abilities; and

that it is his Intention to aſſert, that thoſe who are leaſt furniſh'd with intellectual Abilities, are capable of diſcovering every Thing which is fit and proper to be done. This poſſibly may be alledg'd by our Author. But then I muſt beg leave to remind him of a Paſſage which occurs at the fifth Page of his Book: "I do not mean by this, "that All ſhould have equal Knowledge, "but that all ſhould have what is ſufficient "for the Circumſtances they are in." The Knowledge here mention'd relates entirely to Matters of Morality; —— to Religion, as he terms it; —— to That Religion, which he ſuppoſes to contain every thing morally fit and proper. Here he ſuppoſes that all Men have not equal Knowledge this Way; "I "do not mean that all ſhould have equal "Knowledge;" What then? Why, "that "every Man ſhould have ſufficient for the "Circumſtances he is in." According to this Account there may be higher, or lower Degrees of Capacity in reference to Moral Matters, as no doubt there may: But then, upon this State of the Thing, How will he make good the Propoſition I am now oppoſing, *viz.* that all Things of moral Import are plain and evident, and equally capable of being known by every one?

Not to inſiſt longer on this, I ſhall advance a Step farther, and endeavour to ſhew diſtinctly, from the very Nature of the Sub-

Subject, that a proper Rule of Life is not perfectly diſcoverable by every one, eſpecially by thoſe whom he expreſsly mentions, Men of the loweſt and meaneſt Capacity. To be perfectly acquainted with this, it is neceſſary, in the Firſt Place, That all thoſe ſeveral Principles ſhould be thoroughly known, from which Moral Precepts may, and ought to be deduc'd; otherwiſe we muſt maintain, that Concluſions may be drawn without the Uſe of Premiſes. And, in the next Place, that the Connection between theſe Principles and Precepts is ſo exceedingly clear, that every Perſon concern'd may immediately and diſtinctly diſcern it in every Inſtance. On any other Foot, theſe ſuppos'd Principles are, with reſpect to ſuch a Man, no Moral Principles at all; and the Precepts which he lays down for himſelf, can have no ſufficient Force with him, as not being built on any appearing Fitneſs of the Thing. Theſe Queſtions therefore ariſe, Whether a Perſon of ſuch a ſuppos'd mean Capacity, may gain a full View of all the ſeveral Moral Principles? and, if he may do this, and actually hath done it, Whether he muſt neceſſarily be capable of deducing from them all thoſe Moral Concluſions, which may in juſt Reaſoning follow?

The Principles of Moral Science are none other than the Natures of Things, and the ſeveral Relations which ſubſiſt between

them. Now theſe are ſo far from being apparent to every Man, even to thoſe of the meaneſt Capacities, that I have diſtinctly ſhewn under my Firſt Chapter, they are perfectly diſcoverable by no Man, in the mere Uſe of Natural Reaſon. In reference to God, tho' Something may be known, yet it muſt be confeſs'd that many Things are ſecret to us: In reference to ourſelves, How many Difficulties may be ſtarted even about our own Perſons, of which we can give no tolerable Solutions? And if we are ſo much Strangers to our own perſonal Condition, How much leſs can we determine with Certainty as to Things which relate to others? Little do we know concerning the Nature and Powers of viſible Beings; and ſtill much leſs concerning theſe which are inviſible. Now if the Nature, State, and Condition of Things be, in ſeveral reſpects, undiſcoverable by us, it is certain that the ſeveral Relations which ſubſiſt between them muſt be ſo likewiſe. We know God as our Creator and Preſerver; but then, there may be ſeveral other Relations which he ſuſtains, to us utterly unknown. We are related to other Men as Fellow Creatures of the ſame Kind: This general Relation we know perfectly: But do we know as perfectly all the other Reſpects we may have to one another? We may preſume, upon ſtrong Reaſons, that Men are not the only intelligent creatures in the

the Univerſe: But can we ſay how the Affairs of theſe intelligent Beings are intermix'd with ours? How far we are mutually depended on one another; and conſequently, capable either of forwarding or obſtructing our ſeveral Intereſts? We know ſomething of Natural Beings: But are we ſuch compleat Philoſophers, as to be intimately acquainted with all their ſeveral Powers? And yet, without knowing theſe, How can we ſay what is fit to be done or avoided on every Occaſion?

Our Author himſelf builds his Scheme of Duties on the Natures and Relations of Things. In proportion therefore as theſe ſeveral Natures and Relations are undiſcoverable by us, ſo far muſt our ſeveral Schemes of Duty be defective; or, to ſpeak more properly, ſo far muſt we fall ſhort in our Deſcription of the proper Rule of Conduct. And if the wiſeſt, and moſt inquiſitive, muſt frequently be at a Loſs, can the meaneſt gain a perfect Knowledge of theſe Things? Can the uneducated and illiterate ſo far exceed the Philoſophical Enquirer; and Men of no Parts go ſo much beyond the greateſt and moſt extenſive Genius? At this Rate, Folly can teach us more than Wiſdom. —— But I forbear, in a caſe ſo exceedingly plain, that nothing more is requiſite either to illuſtrate or confirm it.

After all, let us ſuppoſe that the ſeveral Principles of Moral Science were thoroughly knowable; Will it follow from hence, that all the ſeveral Concluſions deducible from them are equally knowable? Doth the like appear in any other Art or Science? Are we to learn, that Truth is almoſt infinite, whilſt the original Principles from which it is deducible, are in many caſes few and plain? Are Men therefore able to reach all theſe Truths; to trace them in all their ſeveral Steps; and to make out every Thing which is, in itſelf capable of being prov'd?

Let us only conſider how few and ſimple the firſt Principles of Geometry are. Theſe may be known eaſily by a Perſon of tolerable Parts and Capacity. But doth it follow, that he is equally capable of maſtering the whole Science, and of making out all the ſeveral Concluſions of a *Newton*, or a *Halley*? No certainly; and therefore a Diſtinction ought to be made between the Capacity of apprehending Principles, and of drawing Concluſions. The Ground and Reaſon of this is plain enough. In order to make out a Concluſion, eſpecially when it is remote from its firſt and original Principle, Men ought to have a Sagacity in diſcerning the ſeveral Relations between Ideas, —— a Fixedneſs and Attention of Mind, that none of theſe Relations may eſcape without ſufficient

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Obſervation, —— Patience and Reſolution to bear the Fatigues of a painful and laborious Search; To which may be added, Opportunity and Freedom from ſuch other Engagements as may either embarraſs them in the Enquiry, or oblige them to break off too ſoon. But are all theſe the Portion of every Man? Is every Man ſagacious, attentive, patient, at leiſure? Whence then comes it to paſs that there is really ſo great a Difference between the intellectual Attainments of Men? Were every Thing ſo eaſy, and attainable in this reſpect, ſurely Men could not fall ſo very ſhort of one another: The mere Pleaſure of maſtering a Truth would move them, if there were not ſomething of ſuperior Difficulty in the Way.

All this will, perhaps, be allow'd by our Author in reference to what he may call Speculative Science: But he will tell us, that the Caſe is different with regard to Practical: There every Thing is, and muſt be eaſy, and obvious to every Enquirer. But let me ask this Gentleman, Is not Reaſoning as neceſſary to deduce practical Concluſions from practical Principles, as ſpeculative Concluſions from ſpeculative Principles? Doth not Reaſoning, as well in the one Caſe as the other, imply a Perception of the Connection or Diſagreement of Ideas in the ſeveral Steps of the Argument? Doth not this in like manner ſuppoſe, that the before-mention'd

Qualifications are equally neceſſary in both Caſes? And if this be true, muſt there not be Difficulties ariſing in both?

To make this more apparent, let us only conſider That Scheme of Morality, which this Author himſelf hath given us; Let us ſee, whether He, with all the Advantages he enjoys of Learning, Parts, Converſation, Leiſure, Books, and the like, hath hit matters off ſo nicely; or, if he ſhall be ſuppos'd to have done ſo, Whether the ſame might as well have been done by the Illiterate, or the Dull, or the Solitary, or the Buiſy. If it could not, then I conceive this Point muſt be yielded me; and the Gentleman I am contending with muſt allow, that a proper Rule of Life, however diſcoverable by him, is not ſo perfectly diſcoverable by every one.

His Scheme of Natural Religion, is This: "'Tis evident by the Light of Nature that "there is a God; or, in other Words, a "Being abſolutely perfect, and infinitely "happy in himſelf, who is the Source of "all other Beings." In the next place, "The Creatures can neither add to, nor "take from the Happineſs of that Being; "and he could have no Motive in framing "his Creatures, or, in giving Laws to ſuch "of them, as he made capable of knowing "his Will, but their own Good." From hence he infers, "That Nothing can be a

"Part

" Part of the Divine Law, but what tends " to promote the common Intereſt of his " Rational Creatures; and every Thing " which does ſo, muſt be a Part of it." In like manner, " He who cannot envy us any " Happineſs our Nature is capable of, can " forbid us thoſe Things only, which tend " to our Hurt." Theſe are the general Principles on which he builds. To which he adds this farther Remark, " Our Reaſon, " which gives us a Demonſtration of the Divine " Perfections, affords the ſame concerning the " Nature of thoſe Duties God requires; not " only with relation to himſelf, but to our- " ſelves, and one another: Thoſe we ſhall diſ- " cern, if we look into ourſelves, and conſider " our own Natures, and thoſe Circumſtances " God hath plac'd us in with relation to our " Fellow-Creatures, and ſee what conduces " to our mutual Happineſs: Of this our " Senſes, the Experience of others, as well " as our own, can't fail to give us ſufficient " Information."

He had juſt before mention'd the Three common Heads of Duty, *viz.* thoſe which relate to God, to ourſelves, and to one another. He now proceeds to give us a more diſtinct Account What thoſe ſeveral Duties are. " With relation to ourſelves, he tells " us, Foraſmuch as God hath endow'd Man " with ſuch a Nature as makes him neceſ- " ſarily deſire his own Good, —— therefore " he

" he cannot require any thing of him in " prejudice of it; but, on the contrary, " that he ſhould do every thing which tends " to promote the Good of it. —— In con- " ſequence of this, That we ſhould avoid " all irregular Paſſions, all unfriendly Af- " fections, all Exceſs of ſenſual Delights, " with all immoderate Deſires." And then he ſums up all in theſe Words, " Whoſo- " ever ſo regulates his Natural Appetites as " will conduce moſt to the Exerciſe of his " Reaſon, the Health of his Body, and the " Pleaſure of his Senſes, taken and con- " ſider'd together, may be certain he can " never offend his Maker.

" As to what God expects from Man with " relation to each other, every one, he af- " firms, muſt know his Duty, who conſi- " ders that the common Parent of Mankind " has the whole Species alike under his Pro- " tection; and will equally puniſh him for " injuring others, as he would others for " injuring him; and conſequently, that it is " his Duty to deal with them as he expects " they ſhould deal with him in like Cir- " cumſtances. —— That Human Nature is " ſo conſtituted, that Men cannot live with- " out Society and mutual Aſſiſtance; and " that God hath endow'd them with Rea- " ſon, Speech, and other Faculties, evi- " dently fitted to enable them to aſſiſt each " other in Matters of Life; That therefore

" 'tis

" 'tis the Will of God, who gives them this " Nature, and endows them with theſe Fa- " culties, that they ſhould employ them " for the common Benefit, and mutual " Aſſiſtance. —— That therefore every Man, " for the ſake of others as well as himſelf, " is not to diſable his Body or Mind by ſuch " Irregularities, as may make him leſs ſer- " viceable to them. —— In ſhort, we cannot " but know, if we in the leaſt conſider, " that whatever Circumſtances Men are " plac'd in by the Univerſal Cauſe of all " Things, that 'tis his eternal and immuta- " ble Will, by his placing them in theſe " Circumſtances, that they act as theſe re- " quire. —— This Conſideration alone will " direct a Man how to act in all Conditions " of Life, whether Father, Son, Husband, " Servant, Maſter, King, &c. "

This is our Author's Sum of Morality or Natural Religion, taken from the Second Chapter of his Book; the Title prefix'd to which is This; " That the Religion of Na- " ture conſiſts in obſerving thoſe Things, " which our Reaſon, by conſidering the " Nature of God and Man, and the Rela- " tion we ſtand in to him, and one another, " demonſtrates to be our Duty; and that " thoſe Things are plain; and likewiſe, " What they are. " Whether this be a juſt and perfect Account of Natural Religion, ſhall be conſider'd immediately: But, if it were

were allow'd to be ſuch, doth our Author think that a Perſon of the loweſt Attainments, or Abilities would, or could have drawn out the ſame by himſelf? Or, doth he indeed think, that now he hath done the Work for him, Things are made ſo exceedingly plain and eaſy, that every one muſt aſſent to his Scheme, and preſently diſcern the true Ground and Foundation of every Duty? For mine own Part, I am ſo far from thinking ſo, that I cannot perſuade myſelf our Author thoroughly underſtands himſelf in every Branch of it. Either his own Ideas were confus'd; or elſe, he hath endeavour'd to impoſe upon his Readers by a ſtudied Confuſion in his Expreſſions. This I ſhall ſupport by offering ſome Remarks on the Scheme itſelf.

Our Author, before he proceeds to a diſtinct Account of the ſeveral Duties incumbent on us, offers ſome previous Reflections neceſſary for the right underſtanding the general Nature of theſe Duties. To this purpoſe he obſerves, "That as the Creature "can neither add to, nor take from the "Happineſs of the Creator, ſo he could "have no Motive in framing his Creatures, "or in giving Laws to ſuch of them as he "made capable of knowing his Will, but "their own Good." Here I would deſire to know, whether by *their own Good* our Author means the particular and perſonal Good

Good of each Creature on whom ſuch Laws are impos'd; or elſe, the Good of ſome or other of his Creatures. If he means the former, the Principle is entirely falſe, and will prove the Foundation of ſuch a Scheme of Morality as is monſtrous. For, upon this Foot, we are concern'd to perform no Actions whatſoever with regard to another, which do not of themſelves, and directly tend to produce ſome Good to ourſelves. What, in this Caſe, will become of Benevolence, Love of the Publick, and the like? But if he means the latter, we may allow it to be in ſome reſpects true. However, I conceive, he ſhould have expreſs'd himſelf more diſtinctly; eſpecially when he was ſetting forth a Scheme, which he intended as a perfect Model, and which was to ſhew us how plain and eaſy every Thing in Morality might be made.

Again; "Nothing can be a Part of the "Divine Law, but what tends to promote "the common Intereſt of his rational Crea-"tures." Here the Gentleman ſeems to carry Matters into another Extream. Before he had aſſerted, that the only End of the Creator in giving Laws to his Creatures, was their own Good; Now he aſſerts, that Nothing can be a Part of the Divine Law, but what tends to promote the common Intereſt. The Truth really lies between both Aſſertions, when they are rightly underſtood: Every Thing

Thing is a Part of the Divine Law, by which our own Good may be promoted conſiſtently with the Publick, or by which the Publick Good may be promoted conſiſtently with our own; and we ſhall run ourſelves into the moſt extravagant Errors, if we propoſe either of theſe in Excluſion of the other. For, tho' in certain Caſes a Man may be oblig'd to forego his own private and perſonal Good, in order to promote the Intereſt of the Publick, yet this can be built on none other Foundation, than that a gracious God will make us Amends hereafter; and ſo, upon the whole, the publick and the private Intereſt will be entirely reconcil'd, and made conſiſtent with each other.

To go on; Our Author affirms, "He "who cannot envy us any Happineſs our "Nature is capable of, can forbid us thoſe "Things only which tend to our Hurt." This is a Propoſition, which however it might be allow'd as ſtanding by itſelf, yet hath no manner of Dependence on that Point which is here aſſign'd as the Principle from which it flows. For, "God cannot "envy us any Happineſs our Nature is "capable of." What then? The natural Inference is This; He cannot forbid us any Thing which tends to our Happineſs, —— Not, "that he cannot forbid us any Thing, "but what tends to our Hurt." However, tho'

tho' the Inference be wrong, the Propoſition may in ſome ſort be admitted: Only we muſt underſtand it with this Reſtriction, the Hurt of ourſelves, or of any other Being; and conſider the Propoſition, even thus underſtood, with a View, not to the Prohibitions of Reveal'd Religion, but merely of Natural.

He obſerves afterwards, "Our Senſes, "and the Experience of others, as well as "our own, can't fail to give us ſufficient "Information" — of what? Why, "of "that which conduces to our mutual Hap-"pineſs." Senſe and Experience may indeed do ſomething here, but not quite ſo much as this Gentleman pretends. Reaſon ſhould be allow'd its proper Share in determining this Matter; otherwiſe we ſhall not make a ſufficient Difference between Men and Brutes. And yet after we have taken all theſe together, I queſtion whether many Things will not be overlook'd, which are really conducive to our Happineſs. The Effects indeed we may feel ſenſibly; but how far Experience, or that Portion of Reaſon which we enjoy, may be able to trace them up to their original Cauſes, is another Point; and I am apt to think there would not be ſo much Unhappineſs in the World, if we could ſo eaſily diſcern the Remedy. But if this be true, then as a perfect Direction cannot be had this way,

we

we may hope for ſomething of that Kind in another. Yet thus much we allow readily, That our Scheme of Natural Law muſt be influenc'd by this Principle, and, ſo far as this, would have been rightly propos'd by our Author, had it been as perfectly repreſented.

With regard to the Duties to ourſelves, this Author informs us, " Whoſoever ſo " regulates his natural Appetites, as will " conduce moſt to the Exerciſe of his Rea- " ſon, the Health of his Body, and the " Pleaſure of his Senſes, taken and con- " ſider'd together, may be certain he can " never offend his Maker. " This Paſſage is expreſs'd ſo obſcurely, that I cannot be certain how far I underſtand it in our Author's Senſe. Perhaps it may not be very plain What the Gentleman here means by " Natural Appetites. " One might be tempted to think, that he intends by this Expreſſion, *Senſual Appetites*; For, ſince theſe only have a Relation to the Pleaſure of the Senſes, which is particularly mention'd in the Cloſe of the Sentence, the Natural Appetites before mention'd in the Beginning of it, ſhould, one might think, ſignify the ſame. I am the more inclin'd to this, from another Paſſage in the very ſame Paragraph; " The Health of the " Body, ſays he, and the Vigour of the " Mind, being highly conducing to our " Good,

" Good, we muſt be ſenſible we offend our " Maker, if we indulge our *Senſes* to the " Prejudice of Theſe. "

As uncertain am I, what our Author means by the Term " conduce; " This Word, underſtood in its proper Senſe, implies ſome Efficiency, ſome direct Contribution of a proper Cauſe to the Production of its Effect. But, in this Senſe, the Government of our Appetites cannot be ſaid to *conduce* either to the Exerciſe of our Reaſon, or the Health of our Body. The Regulating our Paſſions, *&c.* doth indeed remove an Hindrance of the Effects before mention'd, but it doth not directly produce them. I ſhould be apt therefore to ſuſpect, that he really intends thus much; Whoſoever ſo regulates his natural Appetites, as ſhall be *moſt conſiſtent with* the Exerciſe of his Reaſon, *&c.* cannot offend his Maker.

A Queſtion likewiſe may ariſe, What he means by " The Exerciſe of Reaſon. " Is it only the internal Exerciſe of the Faculty? or, Does he intend likewiſe, the Influence of that Exerciſe on our Conduct and Behaviour? I ſhould be apt to think that our Author intends it in the latter Senſe, from conſidering a Paſſage in his 22d p. where he tells us, " The Happineſs of all Beings whatſoever " conſiſts in the Perfection of their Nature: " And the Nature of a Rational Being is " moſt perfect, when it is perfectly Rational,

" *i. e.* when it governs all its actions by the " Rules of right Reaſon." If this be what he means, the whole Amount of the Reflexion given us above, is This; He who governs his natural Appetites ſo, as to act conſiſtently with the Rules of right Reaſon, *&c.* may be ſure he cannot offend his Maker. Upon this View of the Expreſſion, there was no manner of Occaſion to mention any Thing about Health or Pleaſure; for, the Rules of right Reaſon had already taken in every Thing of that Kind. But, if our Author really intends no more than the internal Exerciſe of the reaſoning Faculty, then I conceive there may be ſeveral other Objections made to the Truth and Uſefulneſs of the Reflexion, which ſhall be noted immediately.

Again; our Author obſerves, " Who-" ever ſo regulates his natural Appetites, " *&c.* may be certain he can never offend " his Maker." But what hath this Reflexion to do here, where it was his Buſineſs to tell us Not merely what is lawful, but, what we are bound to in Point of Duty? Or, if he ſhall affirm, that This is really what he intends by the Expreſſion, (as perhaps he may,) beſides that this is an unaccountable Abuſe of Language, I muſt obſerve, that ſome great Difficulties will ariſe about the Truth and Propriety of his Reflexion conſider'd in this Light. For upon this Foot,

it will be the Duty of every Man to indulge his Appetites in all thoſe Inſtances, which conduce to the Pleaſure of the Senſes, if they be only conſiſtent with the Exerciſe of Reaſon, and the Health of the Body. This is a new Duty indeed, and undiſcover'd by all who have gone before this Gentleman in moral Enquiries. Theſe have contented themſelves with barely aſſerting the Lawfulneſs of gratifying our ſenſual Appetites on certain Occaſions; but no One hath ever carry'd the Matter ſo far, as to inſiſt on it as a Point of Duty. In the next Place, it is inſiſting on a Matter as ſtrictly obligatory in ſo looſe a manner, as muſt run us into numberleſs Irregularities of a monſtrous Nature. It is our Duty, it ſeems, to indulge our Senſes: — But, how far? Why, ſo far, as is conſiſtent with the Exerciſe of Reaſon, and the Health of the Body. This indeed may guard Men againſt Exceſſes in Degree, but not at all againſt thoſe Enjoyments which are irregular as to Kind. If ſuch do not impair the Reaſon, nor deſtroy the Health, they are not only allowable, but our Duty. The moſt monſtrous Practices may be juſtified on this Principle.

The next General Head comprehends thoſe Offices which are due to others. Here he tells us, that 'tis our Duty, in the Firſt Place, "Not "to injure others;" and in the next, "To

" employ the ſeveral Faculties we have for the " common Benefit." All this is moſt certainly true; and yet I cannot but object ſomewhat againſt our Author's Management: For, how doth he make out theſe two Concluſions? Why, He deduces them from this ſingle Principle, *viz.* That all Mankind are alike under the *Protection* of God; " Every one (ſays he) " muſt know his Duty, who conſiders, that " the common Parent of Mankind has the " whole Species alike under his Protection." This is an Argument indeed why One Man ſhould not injure another; but is none at all why he ſhould employ his ſeveral Faculties for his Service. This muſt be deduc'd from another Principle, *viz.* That God wills not only the common Safety, but the common Happineſs; which Happineſs cannot be promoted without the mutual Intercourſe of kind offices.

However, let us ſuppoſe our Gentleman to have been entirely right in his arguing; and that all the ſeveral Offices due from one man to another, are reducible to theſe Two Points: ſtill it may not appear ſo plainly, what Kind of Actions may, on certain Occaſions, be ſerviceable, or prejudicial to others. Hath this Gentleman pretended to point out all theſe? So far from it, that he hath not ſo much as hinted at ſeveral of the moſt important: And when he comes to ſpeak of the Relative Duties, we have Nothing more

more than This; "We cannot but know, "if we in the leaſt conſider, that what-"ever Circumſtances Men are plac'd in "by The Univerſal Cauſe of all Things, it "is his eternal and immutable Will, by pla-"cing them in theſe Circumſtances, that they "act as theſe require. This Conſideration "alone will direct a Man, How to act in "all Conditions of Life, whether, Father, "Son, Husband, Servant, Maſter, King, &c." Now, if this be really enough, The Gentleman might have ſpar'd all his Pains in drawing out a Moral Scheme; and have told us, That our Duty implied every Thing, which the Circumſtances we are placed in require. This might have been allow'd him as true, when rightly underſtood: But then it could ſerve to very little Purpoſe, unleſs he could ſhew us diſtinctly, What theſe Circumſtances do require. And if this would really have been a very uſeleſs Account of Morality in the General, I conceive it will be as little ſerviceable, when us'd to ſet forth to us thoſe particular Duties, which ought to have been deſcrib'd diſtinctly.

I ſhall add one Obſervation more on his Scheme, *viz.* That notwithſtanding this Gentleman had reduc'd our ſeveral Duties to theſe Three Heads, *viz.* Things which relate to God, our Neighbour, and ourſelves, yet the Duties to God are in a manner neglected. This is the more remarkable, be-

cauſe he propoſes to lay before us a perfect Scheme of Duty; in which, as the Duties to God are the principal, and apt to have the greateſt Influence on all the reſt, ſo one might expect that theſe ſhould have been trac'd with particular Care, and ſet forth with all the Advantages they deſerve. What he hath juſt hinted in relation to theſe, he pretends to build on God's infinite Happineſs, Goodneſs, Wiſdom, and Power: "From the Conſideration of which Perfec-"tions, he tells us, p. 15. we cannot but "have the greateſt Veneration, nay the "greateſt Adoration and Love for The Su-"preme Being; who, that we may not fail "to be as happy as poſſible for ſuch Crea-"tures to be, has made our acting for our "*preſent*, to be the only Means of obtaining "our *future* Happineſs." It appears from hence, That the Conſideration of the Divine Perfections mention'd before, is carry'd no farther than the Manifeſtations we have of them in the Laws which God gives us: And conſequently, he builds all the Duties we owe to God, merely on the Equity and Tenderneſs of his Laws; whereas I ſhould be apt to think, that Duty in general was owing to him, antecedently to the Conſideration of any particular Laws, and founded in that Right which The Supreme Being hath to give us Laws. But not to inſiſt on the general Duty we owe to God, it may be obſerv'd,

obſerv'd, that in his Definition of Natural Religion, he tells us, it ſignifies "The "Senſe, &c. of thoſe Duties which reſult "from the Knowledge we have of God, "and his Perfections, &c." —— Of God, and his Perfections? —— but how? —— conſider'd in one View only? no, certainly; but taken in every View in which they may be conſider'd by us. On any other Foot than this, as we ſhould build our Duty on too weak a Foundation, ſo ſhould we give it too little an Extent. And what, after all, are the Duties which he inculcates? Why, Veneration, and Love; to which he afterwards adds "Gratitude, and a ſtriving to "imitate him in our extenſive Love to our "Fellow Creatures." Honour, Love, and Gratitude, are indeed Branches of the Duty we owe to God, however lamely they have been made out by this Gentleman: But then, are there none other Duties beſide theſe, which it became him to take Notice of, in a Scheme which was to repreſent to us, How far Natural Reaſon can carry us on this Subject, and to ſuperſede every Thing which Revelation can offer?

I will not ſay that this important Part of Natural Religion was ſlighted with Deſign; tho' one might be tempted to think ſo, by this Paſſage at the Cloſe of his Second Chapter: "We may define True Religion to con-"ſiſt in a conſtant Diſpoſition of Mind to do

" all the Good we can, and thereby to render " ourſelves acceptable to God, by anſwering " the End of his Creation. " To do all the Good we can, is, it ſeems, the Sum of Religion: But then, To whom are we to do Good ? That he tells us elſewhere : Sometimes, he affirms, we are to act for our own Good only ; Sometimes, for the common Good only. If either of theſe Senſes be what he intends here, he muſt exclude all thoſe Duties which we owe to God; For, I ſuppoſe it will hardly be allow'd, that an Endeavour to render ourſelves acceptable to God merely by doing Good to ourſelves or other Men, is, properly ſpeaking, any Inſtance of Duty to God at all.

Several other Reflexions might have been offer'd on this Gentleman's Scheme of Natural Religion : But theſe are ſufficient for my preſent Purpoſe, *viz.* To ſhew, that in his Expreſſions, he is perplex'd, obſcure and doubtful ; in his Arguings, weak and inconcluſive; and in the Scheme itſelf, conſider'd only as a Syſtem of Precepts, miſerably defective. And yet this Gentleman had not only his own good Senſe to direct him, the Learning of all thoſe worthy Enquirers into moral Matters, who have gone before him, for his Aſſiſtance, but likewiſe the Advantage of the Chriſtian Revelation, if he had not thought himſelf above taking any Advantages from conſulting it; From which, however,

however, ſome Benefit he hath received, no doubt, by thoſe Impreſſions which were once made on him, and which he hath not been able to efface entirely. But if This very Gentleman, under all theſe favourable Circumſtances, and whilſt he pretended to give us a perfect Scheme, (which Deſign he executed, without queſtion, as well as he could) hath yet fail'd ſo groſsly, What might we expect from thoſe, whom he terms Perſons of the meaneſt Capacity? —— Perſons leſs capable either of making out the ſeveral Principles of moral Science, or of drawing them forth into thoſe Practical Concluſions, which do truly, and in juſt Reaſoning follow from them? —— I ſhall add nothing more to the direct Proof of this Point, but paſs on,

2. To ſupport it, by examining what This Writer hath advanc'd to the contrary. I ſhall not trouble myſelf with confident Affirmations, where no Reaſon is alledg'd in Proof of them, but only with ſuch as he hath pretended to ſupport with ſome Shew of Arguing. Something to this purpoſe we meet with p. 26. where our Author argues from the End for which Human Reaſon was given us, *viz.* To compare Things, and to judge concerning the Fitneſs or Unfitneſs of Actions; From whence he concludes thus: "Could not our Reaſon judge ſoundly in "all ſuch Matters, it could not anſwer the "End for which God beſtowed it on us."

But

But this I have already conſider'd in my Firſt Chapter, p. 37. I ſhall therefore paſs on to ſome other Matters which may deſerve Examination, and of which no Notice hath been taken hitherto. And,

1. It is alledg'd, " That were we not ca-
" pable by our Reaſon of diſtinguiſhing Good
" from Evil, or knowing from the Conſidera-
" tion of the invariable Perfections of God,
" what the Divine Goodneſs could command,
" or forbid his Creatures, antecedently to
" any external Revelation, we could not di-
" ſtinguiſh the true inſtituted Religion from
" the many falſe ones. " p. 66.

It is here allow'd freely, that every Man, *i.e.* every Moral Agent, is capable, in ſome Senſe, of diſtinguiſhing Good from Evil; For, if he were abſolutely incapable of this, he would ceaſe to be a Moral Agent at all. But the proper Queſtion is here perplex'd, and miſrepreſented by our Author. We are not enquiring, Whether Men are capable of doing this in *any* Inſtances, but whether they are capable of doing it in *all* Inſtances.

Beſides, The Gentleman hath expreſs'd himſelf ſomewhat unfortunately in Theſe Terms, " diſtinguiſhing Good from Evil. " I ſuppoſe he means; the diſcovering that to be Good, which really is Good, and that to be Evil, which really is Evil. If this be his Senſe, I muſt obſerve, that a Man might be incapable of doing this in many Caſes, in which

which he ſhould by no means confound Good with Evil. For, there is plainly a Medium between Good and Evil, *viz.* Indifferent; and, the Errors into which Men are moſt apt to be betray'd, conſiſt in the confounding one or other of theſe Extremes with the Middle.

But, not to criticize on Words, I will take the Objection thus, (as it muſt be taken if he intends it as any Objection at all,) "Unleſs "Men are capable, by their Reaſon, of diſ-"covering every thing which is fit and pro-"per on the one Hand, or unfit and impro-"per on the other, and this antecedently to "any external Revelation, they will be in-"capable of Judging concerning the Reve-"lation itſelf, and of diſtinguiſhing the true "inſtituted Religion from the many falſe "ones.

The Inſufficiency of what is here alledg'd, will appear by a parallel Inſtance. Suppoſe a Queſtion ſhould ariſe, Whether every Man be capable of maſtering the ſeveral Arts and Sciences without a Teacher? and it were alledg'd, That every one muſt be capable of this, or elſe he would be unable to judge Whether his Maſter ſhould teach him right or wrong; and conſequently, that ſuch Teaching could be of no Service to him; Would ſuch Arguing as this, I pray, be admitted? No, certainly: And that for this Reaſon, *viz.* That Things which might not be known, or perhaps knowable without Teaching,

Teaching, may yet immediately approve themſelves to the Mind when taught: In like manner, Things which could not be diſcovered without a Revelation, may yet upon that Revelation appear ſo plainly agreeable with Reaſon, that a Man may not entertain the leaſt Doubt whether they are capable of being true or no. In ſuch a Caſe, where nothing can be concluded from the Nature of the Thing, the External Evidence of the Revelation muſt take Place; and if Men will carefully attend to this, there can be no Room for Error.

Beſides, ſuppoſe I ſhould admit that the Generality of Mankind want either the Capacity or Leiſure to try a Revelation thoroughly by its internal Characters, and to judge concerning every Part of it by the Rule of Fit, and Unfit; What then? Is there no Criterion whereby to diſtinguiſh the true inſtituted Religion from the many falſe ones? I think there is; and that many, and inconteſtable Miracles will ſerve the Purpoſe; concerning the Evidence of which, conſider'd as Facts, Men are much more capable of judging, than they are concerning tedious and abſtract Reaſonings.

And tho' it hath been alledg'd by this Author, that Miracles are no Proof, becauſe theſe are capable of being wrought by Evil Spirits to confirm an Impoſture; yet he muſt allow, if he conſiders that theſe Evil Spirits

are

are ſubject to their Creator; he muſt, I ſay, allow, that no natural Powers they enjoy can be exerciſed without God's Permiſſion: And when he reflects that God is Wiſe and Good, he muſt allow likewiſe, that He will not permit them to uſe this Seal of his Authority to confirm an Impoſture; at leaſt in thoſe Inſtances, where Men are incapable of guarding againſt the Deluſion. On this Foot we may ſecure ourſelves againſt all Difficulties ariſing from this Argument. For if Men are capable of judging concerning miraculous Facts; and if God will not permit thoſe to be wrought in Confirmation of an Impoſture, where Men are of themſelves incompetent Judges of the Doctrines taught, —— then there is none Occaſion, in order to ſecure themſelves from Deluſion, that they ſhould have a full View of theſe Things antecedently to a Revelation. The Wiſdom and Goodneſs of God are a ſufficient Security, notwithſtanding the Imperfection and Weakneſs of Man.

2. A Second Objection to the ſame Purpoſe is drawn from the Univerſality of the Divine Government, and conſequently, the Univerſality of God's Laws. It occurs p. 197. and is thus repreſented by our Author; "When God acts as Governor of the Uni-"verſe, his Laws are alike deſign'd for all "under his Government, *i. e.* all Mankind; "and

" and conſequently, what equally con-
" cerns all, muſt be equally knowable by
" all."

Laws which concern all Men, *i. e.* by which all Men are oblig'd, muſt be capable of being known by all Men. This is certain; becauſe no one can be oblig'd to that, which he is incapable of knowing. So far as this I muſt allow what our Author contends for, with this Reſerve only, tho' ſuch Laws may be knowable by all, yet they may not be *equally* knowable, if by *equally* he means, in the ſame Degrees of Clearneſs and Perfection. But then I muſt obſerve, that this doth by no means come up to the preſent Purpoſe. The Queſtion at preſent is, Not whether every Man is capable of knowing every Thing which is properly to him a Law; but, Whether every Man can, in virtue of his natural Reaſon, diſcover all the Fitneſſes of Things; and conſequently, all that is ſuppos'd capable of becoming a Law by being known. Theſe are quite different Things, and therefore ought not to be confounded.

And, if he ſhall tell us, (as the Argument now under Examination requires he ſhould), that foraſmuch as all Men are equally under God's Government, they muſt have the very ſame Laws given them; and if the ſame Laws are given to all, they muſt be equally knowable by all; —— I muſt deny the Inference,

ference, and maintain, that the Univerſality of Government doth by no means prove the Identity and Univerſality of all God's Laws with regard to his Creatures. This is apparent even in Civil Conſtitutions, in which the ſame Supreme Magiſtrate doth by no means govern all his Subjects by the very ſame Laws, but by ſuch different Rules as are adapted to their ſeveral different Circumſtances. Thus likewiſe The Supreme Being, tho', as Governor of the Univerſe, He be Lord as well of the Irrational as the Rational Part of the Creation, yet He ſtill governs them by different Meaſures; the One by Inſtinct, the Other by the Rules of Reaſon. But whence comes this to paſs? From hence certainly, that the One not having ſuch a Meaſure of Capacity as to be able to form to themſelves a Moral Rule, and to conſider it as The Divine Will, cannot direct their Actions by ſuch a Rule: For the ſame Cauſe muſt we aſſert, that ſince Reaſonable Beings are to govern themſelves by the Rules of Reaſon, it muſt be in Proportion to the Degrees of Reaſon they enjoy, and the Opportunities they have of uſing it: For, as to any Rules of Fitneſs by them undiſcoverable, however evident they may be to other Beings of ſuperior Capacities, they are upon the very ſame Foot with Brutes themſelves, and muſt be exempted from all Obli-

Obligation to them as the Brutes themſelves are.

The Difference therefore between this Gentleman and myſelf on the preſent Argument, is This; I maintain that the Rules of Fitneſs are juſt ſo far univerſal Laws, as they are univerſally knowable; and conſequently, if they are not univerſally knowable, they are not univerſal Laws: He, on the other Hand, ſuppoſes, without any ſufficient Proof, that theſe are univerſal Laws; and from ſuch a ſuppos'd Univerſality of the Laws, concludes, that they muſt be univerſally knowable. I ſhall only add, that this is a Begging the Queſtion, and a Taking that for granted, which he is concern'd to prove.

3. The third Argument by which he endeavours to evince this Point, That a proper Rule of Life is perfectly knowable by Men of the meaneſt Capacity, amounts to this; That the meaner Peoples Circumſtances are, the fewer are the Particulars they are concern'd in; and conſequently, tho' they ſhould be ſuppos'd to fall ſhort of others in Point of Knowledge, yet they may be perfectly acquainted with all thoſe Things in which they have any manner of Concern. We meet with it in the 281ſt p. where our Author thus expreſſes himſelf, "The "meaner People are, and the lower their "Station, the fewer are the Things their

"Duty

" Duty conſiſts in; and thoſe ſo very plain,
" that they cannot well miſtake with Rela-
" tion either to God or Man, were they not
" impos'd on by artful Men."

What are the Matters in which their Duty, properly ſpeaking, conſiſts, *i. e.* which they are ſtrictly oblig'd to, is, as hath been ſaid above, beſide the preſent Queſtion; ſince we are now enquiring Not about The Law which makes Duty, but that proper Rule of Life which is built on Fitneſs. Thus much, however, muſt be allow'd this Gentleman, that the meaner Men are, the fewer will thoſe Things be which are fit and proper for them to do; becauſe, by this means, they will ſuſtain fewer Relations, and conſequently, have leſs to act in Life. But what, I pray, can be concluded from this? That theſe Perſons muſt therefore be capable of diſcovering for themſelves every Thing which is fit and proper for them to do? Will this, I ſay, follow? or is there the leaſt Colour for making this Concluſion? Let me obſerve, that all the ſeveral Fitneſſes which reſult from the Conſiderations of Creator and Creature; of the Relations which ſubſiſt between Intelligent Beings as ſuch; and of thoſe likewiſe which are built on the Conſideration of Man as a Rational Animal, are the ſame with reſpect to Perſons in the meaneſt Condition of Life, as to thoſe in the higheſt. In this regard there is no Dif-

ference between Men, under whatever Variety of Circumſtances they live. But are all theſe ſo perfectly diſcoverable by Men in the loweſt Condition?

Beſides, the Gentleman hath us'd ſomewhat of unbecoming Art in wording his Argument. He tells us, "The meaner "People are, and the lower their Station, "the fewer are the Things their Duty con-"ſiſts in." But the Queſtion doth not relate merely to the Meanneſs of their Circumſtances, but the Meanneſs of their Capacity. "Religion, ſays he p. 197, which "way ſoever reveal'd, carries ſuch internal "Marks of Truth, as at all Times and "Places ſhews itſelf even to the *meaneſt* "*Capacity*, &c." So again p. 284. He declares, "That it makes moſt for the "Honour of God, and Good of Men, to "ſuppoſe, that all God's Laws ſhould carry "with them ſuch evident Marks of Good-"neſs and Kindneſs for the whole Race of "Mankind; that Men of the *meaneſt Capaci-"ties*, even tho' they can't read their native "Language, may know their Duty." 'Tis the Capacity which is the principal Thing to be conſider'd in this Queſtion: And therefore, tho' it ſhould be ſuppos'd, that the bare Meanneſs of Condition ſhould not prevent their diſcovering every Thing which is fit and proper; yet, I hope, the Meanneſs of Mens Capacities might. This I do, and cannot

cannot but maintain. This I have endeavour'd to evince, as well from common Experience, as the Reaſon and Nature of the Thing itſelf: On the other Hand, This Gentleman confidently eſpouſes the other Side of the Queſtion: Is frequent in his Affirmations, and thinks that theſe muſt paſs for Proofs; for, as to any Thing of real Argument, he is entirely deficient; and, if he ever aims at any thing that Way, all the Shew that it even ſeems to have at firſt Sight, is owing to Nothing more than this, that his Expreſſions are equivocal, and the Point he ſpeaks to miſ-ſtated by him. Fit Methods to be us'd in ſo bad a Cauſe!

So much having been offer'd on the Firſt Queſtion, which I propos'd in the Beginning of this Chapter, I ſhall be very brief on the Second; becauſe, if a proper Rule of Life be not perfectly diſcoverable by Men of the meaneſt Capacity, it will follow *à fortiori*, that it cannot be eaſily diſcoverable. Yet ſomething to this Purpoſe may be neceſſary on another Account. For, upon Suppoſition that I ſhould grant all our Author contends for on the former Queſtion, yet I might ſtill diſpute this Point with him, and be able to maintain the Expediency of a Revelation, in order to make the proper Rule of Life more eaſily diſcoverable by Perſons of mean Capacity, than it could

have been from the mere Workings of their Minds.

Let us then ſuppoſe that all Things fit and proper to be done are ſimply diſcoverable by all; Doth it follow from hence that it muſt be eaſily diſcoverable? Is every Thing eaſily to be done, which is poſſible to be done? No certainly: And therefore we muſt try, whether it will appear from other Conſiderations, that this is ſo very eaſy a Matter as this Author contends it is; in doing which, I ſhall proceed, as I did before; and argue as well from the Experience of Mankind, as the Nature of the Thing.

Now, the very Wiſeſt and Greateſt Men have not found it ſo eaſy a Matter to trace out all Things of a Moral Concern. The Philoſophers have buſy'd themſelves this Way, and found full Employment for their Minds; and after all, have been ſo far from diſcovering every Thing they enquir'd after, that ſucceeding Writers have frequently added to the Diſcoveries of their Predeceſſors. Be it therefore, that thoſe who err'd did not err unavoidably; yet ſtill I muſt affirm, that the Conſideration of theſe Errors ſufficiently proves, that the Truths from which they err'd ſo often, were remote; That there were Intricacies in the ſeveral Queſtions before them, —— Things, to them at leaſt, difficult; and conſequently, that the Subject they were upon, was not

ſo very plain and eaſy as this Gentleman repreſents it.

And indeed, had Matters been ſo exceedingly obvious, what Occaſion would there have been for taking any Pains at all? What Occaſion for labouring a Point, which, it ſeems, "is ſo clearly and fully manifeſted in the Book "of Nature, that he who runs may read it?" p. 28. What Occaſion for writing Books on this Subject, and pretending to teach Mankind Matters "which ſhew themſelves ſo plainly "to the meaneſt Capacities?" On this Suppoſition Study were trifling; and the publiſhing to the World Schemes which every one knew before-hand, or might eaſily know without Aſſiſtance from others, muſt be abſolutely ridiculous.

Nay, let me ask This Gentleman, Whether his own Scheme of Morality, defective as it is, coſt him no Pains or Thought at all? Or, if it did not, Whether he could have drawn it out ſo eaſily, had he never accuſtom'd himſelf to cloſe Thinking; had he not formerly examin'd certain Principles with Care, and treaſur'd them up for future Uſe in arguing? Can this therefore be thought ſo very eaſy a Work, even to a Perſon of the meaneſt Capacity, which hath requir'd long preparatory Studies, and a ſettled Habit of Thinking in a Gentleman of good natural Talents? — Or, will he affirm, that the Scheme which he hath now offer'd

to the World is obvious to every Underſtanding, and that Perſons of the meaneſt Capacity muſt take it immediately, Let him try an ordinary and illiterate Perſon, if he pleaſes: And if it ſhall appear upon Trial, that he hath Stated (I will not ſay all Matters of Moral Import, for this he hath not done by any means, but) the ſeveral Particulars mention'd by him ſo clearly, as to be immediately underſtood and aſſented to by every one to whom they are propos'd, I will on this Condition give up the Point.

But ſure I am that this is impoſſible: For, from the Nature of the Thing it is certain, that the more remote any Concluſions are from their original Principles, the greater Attention and Sagacity are requir'd to the making them. Now, where theſe are requir'd, Things cannot be obvious and eaſy to every one. Attention itſelf is painful even to the ſagacious: How much more muſt it be ſo where the Want of Parts ſhall ſtill increaſe the Difficulty! Are there no Moral Concluſions then which depend on a long Train of Reaſoning? —— Perhaps our Author will tell us, No: Every thing is immediately reducible to the Rule of Fitneſs. —— Be it ſo: But then the next Queſtion is, What are the Things which are fit and proper? The Anſwer will be, Thoſe which are ſuitable to the Relations in which we ſtand to God and our Fellow

Creatures.

Creatures. Very well; yet Two new Queſtions will ariſe, What are thoſe Relations; and What are thoſe Actions which are really ſuited to them? Both theſe muſt be ſettled; and each of them will ſtill multiply themſelves into a vaſt Variety of other Queſtions. For, in order to know What theſe ſeveral Relations are, we muſt know, in a good Degree, the ſeveral Natures related; and this will carry us on to ſome of the deepeſt Enquiries in Natural Philoſophy, and Metaphyſicks. Or, ſuppoſing all theſe known, yet ſtill it remains to be enquir'd, What Actions are really ſuited to theſe ſeveral Relations; to determine which we ſhall be oblig'd to enquire farther into the certain, the probable, and, in ſome Caſes, the poſſible Conſequences of our Actions: For, without knowing Theſe, we cannot, in all Caſes, determine What is fit to be done; or, if you pleaſe, What is ſuitable to, and expreſſive of the ſeveral Relations we ſuſtain.

From this ſhort View of Matters it will appear, (if it did not ſufficiently appear before, upon the very firſt Reflection,) that a proper Rule of Life, however diſcoverable ſimply, yet is not eaſily diſcoverable by every one. In Truth, our Author's Aſſertion on this Point, is ſo very groſs, and contrary to common Senſe and Experience, that he hath not pretended to ſupport it

by Argument. He hath, indeed, Once or Twice ſeem'd to intimate ſomething this way, and but ſeem'd to do it. Thus, "I "can't help thinking but, ſuch is The Di- "vine Goodneſs, God's Will is ſo clearly "and fully manifeſted in the Book of Na- "ture, that he who runs may read it." p. 28. And in another Place, "Let any one "ſay, how 'tis poſſible God could more "fully make known his Will to All intel- "ligent Creatures, than by making every "Thing within and without them a Decla- "ration of it, and an Argument for obſer- "ving it." p. 19. In the former Paſſage our Author ſeems to build his Aſſertion on the Conſideration of The Divine Good- neſs. But ſince he hath not endeavour'd to ſhew, how The Divine Goodneſs proves his Point, the bare mention of the Divine Good- neſs can by no Means paſs for an Argument. As to the other Paſſage, in which The Gen- tleman demands, How 'tis poſſible God ſhould more fully make known his Will, than by making every Thing within and without a Declaration of it; or, as he ex- preſſes himſelf in another Place, "[God] "cannot ſpeak more plainly than he hath "already done by the Things themſelves;" p. 27. Here likewiſe he confidently affirms a Point without proving it. And his Confi- dence is the more ſurpriſing, becauſe he carries Matters ſo much farther than any one

hath

hath ever pretended to carry them before him. Still, this is not all; Our Author, not content barely to aſſert, that God cannot make Things plainer in any other Way, than he hath done by the Nature of Things, goes on to maintain, That if a Revelation ſhould be given us, yet it will be more difficult to underſtand the Proof, and to comprehend the Meaning of it, than it is to diſcover what is fit and proper from the Nature and Reaſon of Things. This is bold indeed: And if he can make this Aſſertion good, the Credit of Revelation muſt ſink entirely. For That is no Revelation where Nothing is reveal'd; and Nothing can be reveal'd, if Things cannot be made more eaſy than they were before. A Point of this Conſequence will deſerve to be conſider'd in a Chapter by itſelf.

CHAP.

CHAP. VI.

Whether a proper Rule of Life be more eaſily, and more perfectly diſcoverable by us, than the Proof or Meaning of a Revelation can be.

BEFORE I proceed to the particular Examination of this Queſtion, I muſt obſerve ſomewhat on Two or Three Diſtinctions, which frequently occur in this Gentleman's Performance, and which may be apt to confound and miſlead his Readers, if they are not rightly underſtood, and carefuly attended to.

He diſtinguiſhes then, between Revelation *Internal*, and *External*; *Immediate*, and *Mediate*; *Original*, and *Traditional*. By Revelation internal, immediate, and original, he means the Diſcovery which is made of Things in the Uſe of our natural Reaſon; and by Revelation external, mediate, and traditional, he underſtands what the World generally underſtands by the word Revelation, *i. e.* ſuch a Diſco-

a Diſcovery as God is pleas'd to make, or is ſuppos'd to make to us in an extraordinary Way. I preſume, he calls it external, becauſe it is confirm'd to us by external Signs, ſuch as Miracles, or the like; mediate, becauſe it is deliver'd to us by the Mediation of Prophets; and traditional, becauſe deliver'd down from one to another ſucceſſively, in the ſame way as other Traditions are.

But, is This ſuch a Uſe of the word Revelation as can be juſtify'd by the common Forms of Speaking? Have the Generality of Authors diſtinguiſh'd concerning Revelation in the way he hath? Do not Writers underſtand by it, ſuch a Manifeſtation of the Divine Will, as is made by ſome extraordinary Act of God himſelf? Do we ever read that Mathematical or Natural Philoſophy is made known to us by *internal*, *immediate*, and *original Revelation?* But why might not Theſe be as well ſaid to be reveal'd as Ethicks, if Revelation neceſſarily imported nothing more, than a Diſcovery made in the mere Uſe of Reaſon? The Truth is, I cannot but think the Gentleman had a Deſign to ſerve by this affected Singularity of Expreſſion; and that his Intention was, to perplex and deceive his Readers.

However this Matter be, I muſt inſiſt on it, That Revelation, in the proper Senſe of the Word, ſignifies, The Diſcovery of ſome-

ſomething made to us by an extraordinary Act on God's Part. If this be true, then Internal Revelation will be, the making this Diſcovery by ſome internal Act upon the Mind of that Perſon to whom it is made: Revelation is Immediate, when no ſubordinate Agent is employ'd, in order to convey the Diſcovery; and Original, when the Diſcovery is not deliver'd down in Succeſſion, as Traditional Matters are. On the other hand, Revelation external ſignifies, the making Diſcoveries of certain Things, and confirming the Truth and Reality of them by external Evidence; Revelation mediate, is, the communicating to ſome, the Diſcoveries made to others, by immediate Revelation; and Traditional ſignifies, the conveying down from one to another, in Succeſſion, thoſe Diſcoveries, which may be trac'd up to original Revelation.

I might, after having noted the general Uſe of theſe Terms, and explain'd myſelf on the proper Meaning of them, apply them in a Senſe different from this Author. But I ſhall chuſe rather to forbear: And where this Author uſes the term Internal Revelation, I ſhall expreſs my ſelf by the Diſcovery of Natural Reaſon; and what he calls External Revelation, I ſhall term Extraordinary Revelation.

This being noted, I ſhall paſs on to the Great Point, which muſt be the Subject of the

the preſent Chapter; and obſerve, that Two Queſtions will here ariſe:

1. Whether a proper Rule of Life be more eaſily and more perfectly diſcoverable, in the mere Uſe of our Reaſon, than it can be by any immediate Act of The Supreme Being upon our Minds, revealing it to us? And,

2. Whether it be more eaſily and more perfectly diſcoverable in the Uſe of Reaſon, than the Proof or Meaning of that Revelation is, which hath either been deliver'd to us by the ſubordinate Inſtruments of Providence, or convey'd down to us from one to another in the traditionary way? And tho' this latter Queſtion is what I am principally concern'd to examine, yet the former muſt not be left untouch'd.

Let it be ſuppos'd then, if you pleaſe, that a proper Rule of Life is diſcoverable by us in the Exerciſe of Reaſon: Let it be ſuppos'd again, that this may be diſcover'd in the utmoſt Perfection, and without any diſcouraging Difficulties: Yet ſtill, cannot The Supreme Being make the ſame Diſcoveries to us by an immediate Action upon our Minds, and without the Intervention of Reaſon in collecting them? No doubt but he may do this, if he pleaſes: For, as the doing this implies no manner of Contradiction, and conſequently muſt be the Object of Power; ſo it muſt be free and open to him

him who is the original Fountain of Power. It is abſurd to affirm, that He who created our very Beings, is incapable of acting upon them; or that he cannot as well impreſs Sentiments on the Mind, capable of receiving them, as produce Motion in Bodies capable of being mov'd. Now, ſuch a Revelation as this, is commonly expreſs'd by the word Inſpiration; which, if God ſhould be pleas'd to grant Men, this Queſtion will ariſe; Whether Matters, diſcoverable by the ordinary Exerciſe of Reaſon, be more eaſily and perfectly diſcoverable that way, than they can be by Inſpiration itſelf?

To determine this Queſtion, I muſt obſerve, That by Reaſon, in this Place, muſt be meant the Faculty of deducing ſome Truths from others which were known before; This ſuppoſing ſome original Principles to build upon term'd Self-evident, makes out Concluſions by ſhewing their neceſſary Connexion with theſe Principles. The Rule of Life therefore conſiſting of a Variety of Precepts not evident of themſelves, but proveable, muſt be made out by our Reaſon in the way of Inference: In which Caſe, in Proportion to the Degrees of Reaſon enjoy'd by any one, his Collection of Precepts will be more or leſs perfect, and made with greater or leſs Diſpatch and Eaſe.

Give me Leave therefore to aſk, Whether, upon Suppoſition that God ſhould impreſs

preſs on Mens Minds, in the way of Inſpiration, a Senſe of thoſe Precepts which conſtitute the proper Rule of Life; —— Let me ask, I ſay, Whether the Knowledge acquir'd this way, might not be as perfect or extenſive, and as eaſily attain'd, as by the ordinary Exerciſe of Reaſon in the way of arguing. This ſurely cannot be made a Queſtion, when we conſider, that if God can make any one Kind of Impreſſions on us, he may make any other Kind which we are capable of receiving: And when he does ſo, the Precepts impreſs'd will have as certain an Evidence as that which belongs to Principles Self-evident: They will be perceiv'd with the ſame Eaſe; and therefore cannot be more difficult to be apprehended, than thoſe which are made out in a long Courſe of Arguing.

There is a Paſſage in our Author which ſeems to contradict what is aſſerted by me here; and upon which I muſt offer ſome Remarks before I diſmiſs this Point. "Were "it not (ſays he) for thoſe Self-evident "Notions, which are the Foundation of all "our Reaſonings, there could be no intel-"lectual Communication between God and "Man; Nor, as we are fram'd, can God "aſcertain us of any Truth, but by ſhew-"ing its Agreement with theſe Self-evident "Notions, which are the Teſts whereby "we are to judge of every Thing, even

" the Being of a God, and Natural Religion. p. 184.

I conceive from what hath been ſaid above, there might be an intellectual Communication between God and Man, without any Regard had to thoſe Self-evident Notions, of which our Author ſpeaks. No one troubles himſelf about Self-evident Notions, in the mere Exerciſe of his Self-conſcious Power, or the bare Perception of what paſſes within him. Whenever therefore God ſhall make any Impreſſions on us, Theſe alſo may be perceiv'd, without any regard to Self-evident Notions. And, as the Impreſſions may be thus perceiv'd, ſo likewiſe may it be known from whence theſe Impreſſions come. For, no one can reckon it impoſſible but God may, if he pleaſes, make us as intimately conſcious that theſe Impreſſions are made by him, as that any Impreſſions are made on us at all. Now, if this be true, then God may hold intellectual Communication with us, notwithſtanding he ſhould not refer us back to firſt and Self-evident Notions.

Our Author goes on; " Nor, as we are " fram'd, can God aſcertain us of any Truth, " but by ſhewing its Agreement with thoſe " Self-evident Notions, which are the Foun- " dation of all our Reaſoning." This is a very bold Limitation of The Divine Power; and the more inexcuſable, becauſe it is ſo evidently

evidently void of all manner of Foundation. But, whilſt our Author is aſſerting ſo boldly, and telling us ſo magiſterially, what God can, or cannot do, it would have become him to have expreſs'd himſelf in a clear and determinate manner; which, I conceive, he hath by no means done in the preſent Caſe. What, I would beg to know, does he mean by the *Agreement* of Truth with Self-evident Notions? Does he mean a Conſiſtency with them? or, Does he mean a Connexion with them? If he intends the latter, (as I am led to think he does, from conſidering the Courſe of his Reaſoning in this Paragraph), then his Aſſertion will amount to this, That God cannot aſcertain us of any Truth, but by arguing us into it, and proving it to us in the viſible Connexion it hath with firſt and Self-evident Principles. His Sentiments to this Purpoſe are plainly repreſented in another Place, p. 199. where he tells us, "The Holy Ghoſt cannot deal with Men "as rational Creatures, but by propoſing Ar-"guments to convince their Underſtandings, "and influence their Wills, in the ſame "manner as if propos'd by other Agents; "For, to go beyond this, would be making "Impreſſions on Men as a Seal does on "Wax, to the confounding of their Reaſon "and Liberty in chuſing; and the Man "would then be merely paſſive; and the "Action would be the Action of another

" Being acting upon him, for which he " could be no ways accountable. "

Upon this State of the Matter I ſhall offer Two Remarks:

1. That our Author's Aſſertions are abſolutely falſe, and in their Conſequences monſtrous. And,

2. If they were true, they would not prejudice the main Point contended for under this Head.

As to the Truth of his Aſſertion, " That " God cannot aſcertain us of any Truth, but " by ſhewing its Agreement with Self-evi- " dent Notions; And, that The Holy Ghoſt " cannot deal with Men as rational Crea- " tures, but by propoſing Arguments, *&c.* in " the ſame manner as propos'd by other A- " gents; " I muſt obſerve, that we may be, and often are certain of many Truths, without recurring to thoſe Arguments, which ſhew their Connexion with Principles ſelf-evident. In many Things we depend on the Authority of Men, whoſe Skill and Veracity we eſteem; and this in Proportion to the Aſſurance we have of their intellectual and moral Characters. It is true indeed, our Aſſent to Matters on this Foundation cannot be properly term'd Knowledge: But the Queſtion is not here, Whether we can be properly ſaid to know this way; but, Whether we can receive Aſſurance from it. It muſt be confeſs'd farther, that foraſmuch as Men are imperfect, as well with regard to their intel-

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lectual Character as their moral, ſo we cannot receive any abſolute Aſſurance in Matters which depend on mere human Authority. But yet, were there any Men abſolutely incapable of being deceiv'd themſelves, and of deceiving Others, we might then receive as great an Aſſurance concerning the Truth of Propoſitions affirm'd by them, as we are able to draw from Demonſtration itſelf. The Certainty would be the ſame in both Caſes, how much ſoever the Methods of producing it might differ. Put the Caſe then, that God himſelf ſhall affirm a Propoſition; —— ſhall either impreſs it on a Man's Mind in the Way of Inſpiration, or convey it to Men confirm'd by ſuch Proofs as are ſufficient Evidences of a Divine Authority: —— In this Caſe, I ſay, the Truth of the Propoſition will be entirely certain; not perhaps from any appearing Connexion which the Propoſition has with Notions ſelf-evident, but from another Conſideration which will equally ſecure its Truth, *viz.* That God hath affirm'd it, who can neither err, nor deceive.

Thus much with regard to ſpeculative Propoſitions: In reference to practical, or thoſe Precepts by which we are to direct our Behaviour, the Point will be, if poſſible, clearer. The proper Queſtion on this Head muſt be, What is the Will of God: And this muſt be diſcover'd to us, either in the Uſe of our natural Reaſon, or elſe by extraordinary

Communication from God himſelf. In the former Way Men argue from the Nature and Fitneſs of the Thing, that the Wiſe and Good Author of our Being muſt will it; from whoſe Will, thus diſcover'd, our Obligation to conform ourſelves to theſe Precepts is derived. Now if ſuch Rules, founded in Fitneſs, become to us Precepts or Laws, not merely on Account of the Fitneſs itſelf, but becauſe they are the Will of God; and if the Conſideration of Fitneſs is only one Way whereby we come to learn What God's Will, in this reſpect, is; —— then, whatever elſe will point out God's Will, muſt equally diſcover thoſe Precepts. Put the Caſe then that a Body of Laws is deliver'd: May we not be aſſur'd, that theſe Laws are the Will of God, from the very Delivery and Confirmation of them, unleſs we are argued into it in the other Way, by tracing Matters up to ſelf-evident Principles? Is it any more impoſſible for God to manifeſt his Will by an expreſs Declaration of it, than it is for Man to do ſo? And yet we ſee, this is done every Day in Civil and Domeſtick Concerns: and we think ourſelves ſufficiently appriz'd of the Will of our Superiors by their expreſs Declarations, without enquiring nicely on what Reaſons they proceed, and what Connection there is between the Precepts given and other neceſſary and ſelf-evident Truths.

Nor

Nor will it follow at all from hence, as our Author contends it muſt, that if The Holy Ghoſt ſhould deal with us otherwiſe than merely by propoſing Arguments; —— that if he ſhould inform us directly what God requires, without aſſigning the Ground and Reaſon of the Command, "This would be "a making Impreſſions on Men, as a Seal "does on Wax, to the confounding of their "Reaſon, and Liberty in Chooſing." Let the Gentleman ſhew me, How this confounds Reaſon at all: Let him tell me, What One Principle of Reaſon it contradicts; or, in what reſpect it croſſes upon, or hinders the Exerciſe of Reaſon. For, even in this Caſe, tho' the Precept be delivered without aſſigning the Reaſon of it, yet Men are ſtill at Liberty to ſearch out the Reaſon, if they pleaſe: And whilſt they maintain an unreſerv'd Obedience to the Divine Will, the Application of their Reaſon to this purpoſe will be proper, and, upon that Account, acceptable to God. But What if, after all, the real Ground of the Precept given ſhall ſtill conceal itſelf? Why, even in this Caſe there will appear a ſufficient Reaſon for Obedience, becauſe God himſelf injoins it: So far as this, Reaſon ſtill directs us; and conſequently, cannot be oppos'd, or confounded this Way.

But he adds farther, that this deſtroys Liberty; —— that "the Man would then be paſſive; "and the Action would be the Action of

" another Being acting upon him, for which " he could be no ways accountable. " But let me ask, In what reſpect is the Man paſſive? What is the Action, concerning which our Author here ſpeaks? and, What is that Thing for which he cannot, in this Caſe, be accountable? Why, All this muſt be referr'd to the Act of Inſpiration, or that Act whereby the Will of God is made known to him in a Way extraordinary. In this reſpect Man is, no doubt, paſſive: The Action is the Action not of the Man but of the Inſpirer; and for having or not having this Action exerted upon him he cannot be accountable: Whether a Man ſhall be really inſpir'd or not, is not the Concern of his own Liberty, but God's. But, what then? Is not a Man ſtill free either to obey thoſe reveal'd Precepts, or to diſobey them? and conſequently, Is not the natural Liberty of Action as well maintain'd in this way as in our Author's? Surely this cannot need a Proof.

Hitherto I have endeavour'd, in the direct way of Argument, to refute our Author's groſs Aſſertion, " That God cannot aſcertain " us of any Truth, but by ſhewing the Con- " nexion it hath with ſelf-evident Notions: " I ſhall now advance a Step farther, and point out ſome of the monſtrous Conſequences which will follow upon Suppoſition that the before-mentioned Aſſertion is true.

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The Aſſertion muſt reſolve itſelf into this Principle, *viz.* That we cannot be aſcertain'd of any Truth whatſoever, but in that way of tracing Matters which our Author hath inſiſted on. If this be admitted, then how came we to be aſcertain'd of theſe firſt Principles or ſelf-evident Notions themſelves? Not ſurely by tracing them back to other ſelf-evident Principles: This our Author, bold as he is, will not ſuppoſe: Or, if he ſhould, he muſt be reduc'd to this Abſurdity, *viz.* That we cannot be aſcertain'd of any Thing but by tracing it back from Principle to Principle *in infinitum*, *i. e.* We can never be certain of any Thing at all. What, again, will he ſay of Senſitive Knowledge, or the Aſſurance we have of Things without us in the Exerciſe of our Senſes? This certainly is not made out by any Connexion which theſe Things have with other ſelf-evident Truths. Or, will he affirm, That we cannot be ſure of any Thing upon the Credit of Human Teſtimony? Then farewell not only to the Faith of Hiſtory, but to all civil Faith: The Ties of Society, and the Grounds of Commerce are deſtroy'd entirely. Or, will this Gentleman affirm, That civil Governors cannot preſcribe to their Subjects otherwiſe than by teaching them the Reaſon and Fitneſs of their Commands, —— by applying to them in the demonſtrative Way, and arguing them into Obedience juſt as Philoſophers inſtruct their Pupils? And

yet, this he muſt affirm, if the Poſition he hath laid down be true, unleſs he will allow more to Civil Magiſtrates, than he doth to the Supreme Governor of the Univerſe. Theſe are Conſequences ſo manifeſtly following from what our Author hath advanc'd, and ſo extravagant in themſelves, that I cannot think any Thing farther is neceſſary to overthrow this Poſition, than to point out theſe Conſequences.

After all, ſuppoſing what our Author hath here aſſerted were true, yet ſtill it would not prejudice the main Thing contended for under this Head; nor prove in the leaſt, that a proper Rule of Life is more perfectly and more eaſily diſcoverable by us in the ordinary Uſe of Reaſon, than it can be by a ſpecial Revelation from God.

Let us imagine then, however extravagant the Imagination may ſeem, "that God cannot aſcertain us of any Truth but by ſhewing its Agreement with ſelf-evident Notions: And, that The Holy Ghoſt cannot deal with Men as rational Creatures, but by propoſing Arguments, *&c.* in the ſame manner as propos'd by other Agents;" yet ſtill I ſay, If God may act directly upon the Mind, he may, by this Means, aſſiſt our natural Powers; He may make ſome Matters appear to us, which would never have appear'd otherwiſe; He may ſhew their Connexion with ſelf-evident Truths more

more diſtinctly; or, carry us on from one Concluſion to another, thro' the whole Courſe of the Argument, with much greater Diſpatch and Eaſe. Don't we ſee, that notwithſtanding we all of us enjoy certain Portions of natural Reaſon, by the Uſe of which we are capable of making Improvements in the ſeveral Sciences, yet we act this Way with much better Succeſs whilſt directed by ſome skilful Perſon, than if we had been left entirely to ourſelves. The Reaſon of this is plain enough: It is not the mere Power of Reaſon, but the Exerciſe of this Power which diſcovers Truth to us: And in this Exerciſe it is neceſſary, that the ſeveral Ideas by which a Concluſion is made out, ſhould be laid in their proper Order: This a faithful Teacher may inſtruct us to do; in Conſequence of which thoſe Truths ſhall become manifeſt, which might otherwiſe not have appear'd at all. Suppoſing therefore, that God cannot deal with us as rational Creatures, but by applying to our Reaſon; yet if we allow, (as we muſt allow), that he may order a proper Train of Ideas in our Minds, —— that he may ſtrengthen the very Faculty of Reaſon itſelf, and fix our Thoughts on thoſe Matters we are concern'd to attend to, it will follow, not only that ſome Things ſhall appear in a ſtronger Light, but likewiſe that others ſhall

offer

offer themſelves, which might not have been diſcover'd on any other Foot at all.

I do by no means affirm, that this is the whole Amount of Divine Inſpiration. Doubtleſs it reaches much farther than this comes to. All that is intended here, is This; that our Author cannot maintain his Ground even upon his own Terms, and that ſome of the great Branches of his Scheme may be overthrown even by granting the main Principles he contends for.

But ſtill it will be alledg'd, that what I have advanc'd hitherto doth not come up to the Point. For, ſuppoſing that God might make Matters clearer to us by immediate Inſpiration, than they are in the ordinary Uſe of our Faculties, yet How is the Cauſe of Reveal'd Religion at all ſupported? Is it pretended on our Part, that this Religion is made known to all Men by immediate Revelation? Was it not, (if ever reveal'd at all), originally reveal'd to a few, and deliver'd by them to others? Was not the Religion, now receiv'd by us as reveal'd, deliver'd down from one to another in a long Succeſſion of Ages, if it hath really been ſo deliver'd down, and was not rather the Invention of Prieſts in ſome dark Ages? In ſhort, whilſt Matters ſtand on this Foot, our Author thinks a proper Rule of Life may be diſcover'd more perfectly and more eaſily in the Uſe of Reaſon, and that by Perſons of the

the meaneſt Capacities, than either the Proof, or Meaning of ſuch a traditional Revelation can be.

I have ſhewn in my former Chapter, by ſeveral Paſſages cited from this Author's Book, that he reckons every Man, even thoſe of the meaneſt Underſtanding, capable of diſcovering a proper Rule of Life perfectly and with Eaſe. Things of this Kind, he tells us, are ſtrictly demonſtrable from the Natures of Things, and the Relation which we bear to God, and our Fellow Creatures. But the Caſe is otherwiſe as to a traditional Revelation: "That God reveal'd "himſelf by *Viſions*, *Dreams*, *Trances*, or "any other Way beſides the Light of Na- "ture, can only come under the Head of "Probability. And if it be but probable "that God made any external Revelation at "all, it can be but probable, tho', perhaps, "not in the ſame Degree of Probability that "he made this or that Revelation. And "this Evidence all pretend to, ſince, per- "haps, there never was a Time or Place, "where ſome external Revelation was not "believed, and its Votaries equally confi- "dent that theirs was a true Revelation. "And, indeed, the prodigious Numbers of "Revelations, which from Time to Time "have been in the World, ſhew how eaſily "Mankind may in this Point be impos'd "upon. And as there can be no Demon-

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" ſtration of the Revelation itſelf, ſo neither " can there be of its Conveyance to Poſte- " rity; much leſs, that This or That has " been convey'd entire to diſtant Times and " Places; eſpecially if a Revelation be of " any Bulk, and which may have gone " thro' the Hands of Men, who not only in " the dark Ages of the Church, but even in " the Beginning, if we judge by the Num- " ber of corrupted Paſſages, and even forg'd " Books, were capable of any pious Fraud. " Nay, the very Nature of Probability is " ſuch, that were it only left to Time itſelf, " even that would wear it quite out. " p. 184, 185. The Paſſage here produc'd, takes in the principal Things alledg'd by this Writer, to ſhew the Uncertainty which every traditional Revelation muſt carry with it; and conſequently, how ineffectual it muſt be, when compar'd with common Reaſon, to aſcertain a proper Rule of Life.

But, however certain and evident the Proof of the Revelation ſhould be, yet ſtill our Author maintains it muſt be obſcure and difficult as to its Meaning. To this purpoſe he obſerves, " Had there been but one Lan- " guage, and a Book writ in that Language, " in indelible Characters, (ſo that there could " be none of thoſe Thirty Thouſand vari- " ous Readings, which are own'd to have " crept into the New Teſtament,) and all " could have Acceſs to it, yet even then, " con-

" conſidering how uncertain the Meaning of " Words are, and the Intereſt of deſigning " Men to put a wrong Senſe on them, it " muſt be morally impoſſible that this Reli- " gion could long continue the ſame." p. 288.

There is another Paſſage, p. 290, in which our Author carries the Matter ſomewhat farther. " There are, ſays he, ſcarce any " Words in any one Language, except of " ſuch Things as immediately ſtrike the " Senſes, that are adequately anſwer'd in " another, ſo as exactly to comprehend the " ſame Ideas: And if the Ideas are only " fewer or more, what Confuſion may not " that occaſion? How great and frequent " muſt the Miſtakes Then be in tranſlating " the antiquated Languages of People who " liv'd at a vaſt Diſtance of Time, as well " as in Countries far remote; and affected " hyperbolical, parabolical, myſtical, alle- " gorical, and typical Ways of expreſſing " themſelves, as oppoſite to the Uſage in " other Parts as Eaſt is to the Weſt? And " not only this, but it will be likewiſe ne- " ceſſary to have an accurate Knowledge " of their Manners, Cuſtoms, Traditions, " Philoſophy, Religious Notions, Sects, " Civil and Eccleſiaſtical Polity; of all which " the common People know as little as they " do of the original Languages; who hav- " ing very obſcure and incompetent Con- " ceptions of the principal Words and Phra-

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" ſes us'd in the Verſions, their Religion
" muſt needs be a very odd Jumble of con-
" fus'd and inconſiſtent Notions, were it to
" depend on Words, and their preciſe Mean-
" ing, and not on the Things themſelves,
" and their Relations, which are plain and
" obvious to common Capacities; they would
" be in a manner entirely govern'd by Sounds,
" ſome of which, ſuch as they us'd to hear
" ſpoken of with reſpect, they would high-
" ly reverence; while others, tho' of the
" ſame Signification, they would as much
" abhor, 'till Cuſtom had made them fami-
" liar."

I ſhall begin with examining what our Author hath advanc'd in relation to the Proof and Evidence of a traditional Religion; the Sum of which may, I think, be reduc'd to the following Particulars; 1. That the Proof of a traditional Revelation can only come under the Head of Probability; whereas the Evidence of a proper Rule of Life is, upon Principles of natural Reaſon, demonſtrative. 2. That this Argument from Probability labours under great Difficulties upon account of the ſeveral Pretences to Revelation which have been confidently inſiſted on in almoſt every Age of the World, and the Credulity of Mankind in admitting ſuch Pretences. 3. That there is great Uncertainty in the Conveyance, ariſing from the Frauds of Men, who may corrupt ſome Things, and forge

forge others, and have ſeveral Times in Fact done ſo. To which he adds, 4. That if the foregoing Difficulties were given up, yet the Nature of Probability is ſuch, that were it only left to Time itſelf, even that would wear it quite out.

Upon the 1ſt Branch of this Gentleman's Objection I muſt obſerve, that however a proper Rule of Life may be in itſelf demonſtrable, yet What doth This ſignify in order to fix and ſettle it, if Men are incapable of making out this Demonſtration? How difficult this really is, even to Men of Thought and Learning, may appear by the Paſſage before cited from Mr. *Lock*, who car'd not to attempt the Work, tho' he ſaw clearly it was in itſelf capable of being done.

Having mentioned Mr. *Lock* here, I ſhall take the Liberty to add another Paſſage in his *Familiar Letters*, [p. 144] as very pertinent in this Place. "When I conſider that "a Book of Offices —— ought not to be "ſlightly done, eſpecially by me, after "what I have ſaid of that Science in my "*Eſſay*, —— I am in Doubt whether it would "be prudent in one of my Age and Health, "not to mention other Diſabilities, to ſet "about it. Did the World want a Rule, I "confeſs there could be no Work ſo ne-"ceſſary, nor ſo commendable. But the "Goſpel contains ſo perfect a Body of "Ethicks, that Reaſon may be excus'd from

"that

" that Enquiry; ſince ſhe may find Man's " Duty clearer and eaſier in Revelation, than " in herſelf. Think not this the Excuſe of " a lazy Man, tho' it be perhaps of one, " who having a ſufficient Rule of his Acti- " ons, is content therewith." We ſee this excellent Perſon had other Notions of traditional Revelation than the Gentleman I am now debating with. He tells us, that Reaſon may be excus'd from the Enquiry, ſince ſhe may find Man's Duty clearer, and eaſier in Revelation, than in herſelf. And this he affirms, tho' he knew well at the ſame Time, that the Proof of a traditional Revelation was not of that Kind which is ſtrictly and properly demonſtrative.

To return: I muſt aſſert, that altho' Morality be in itſelf demonſtrable; yet ſo few Men being capable of making it out in the demonſtrative Way, they muſt, for the moſt Part, act upon Evidence which is only probable. This, I ſay, muſt be the Caſe, even tho' we ſhould ſuppoſe that Religion ſubſiſted only as the Preſcription of human Reaſon. Even here Men do, and muſt determine themſelves on numberleſs Occaſions by Arguments probable; by Arguments, where the Principles they build on are to them only probable; or at leaſt where the Connexion, and Dependance of one Part of the Argument upon another ſhall only appear to be ſo. Yet ſtill Morality is not ſub-

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verted by this: Men are concern'd in this Caſe, to do the beſt they can; and muſt content themſelves with ſtrong Probabilities, where ſtrict and proper Demonſtration may not be had by them.

I ſhall advance a Step farther, and affirm, that in many Inſtances the Aſſurance ariſing from the Concurrence of ſeveral Probabilities, is as effectual, and will lay as ſtrong a Foundation to determine us in our Conduct, as Demonſtration itſelf. It is on this Foot we regulate our Behaviour in Civil Life. He who ſhould refuſe to obey a Civil Law 'till he had ſtrict Demonſtration that it really was a Civil Law, would be quickly taught to alter his Meaſures, in a way he would not like. In all Caſes of this Nature we do, and muſt build on ſuch Probabilities, as the Nature of the Thing will admit of. Theſe, I ſay, Men act upon, and upon theſe they muſt act, if they act at all.

Nor is it any Prejudice to our Aſſurance, that in Matters built on probable Evidence, there remains a Poſſibility of Miſtake; or that in ſuch Caſes we have ſometimes been deceiv'd formerly: Will it follow from hence, that we can have no ſufficient Aſſurance this Way? Are we to give no Credit to the Evidence of Senſe, becauſe we have ſometimes err'd by depending on it? Or, may we not be certain, in any one Caſe whatſoever, that we are not deceiv'd, becauſe we diſcover that in ſome

Caſes we have been deceiv'd? I think the very contrary to this is true; and becauſe we know that in ſome Caſes we have been deceiv'd, we are therefore certain that we are not deceiv'd always.

Let us admit then, that the Evidence of a traditional Revelation is not ſtrictly a demonſtrative Evidence; What Concluſion, I pray, can be drawn from hence? Is it therefore no Evidence at all; or, Muſt it therefore be an inſufficient and precarious one? Is it, in the Nature of Things, impoſſible that any Man ſhould have ſuch Proof of a Revelation made in any diſtant Age, as ſhall carry with it ſufficient Weight to determine the Aſſent of a ſober and thinking Man? He who will aſſert this, muſt aſſert withal, that 'tis impoſſible to have any ſufficient Aſſurance of paſt Facts at all; and conſequently, all the Evidence of ancient Hiſtory muſt fall of Courſe.

But our Author will return upon us, That the Queſtion at preſent is, Whether the Evidence of Natural Religion, and of Reveal'd, be equally ſtrong: And in Proof of the Negative, he alledges, That the One is demonſtrable, whilſt the other can ſubſiſt only on Probability. The Evidence therefore in the one Caſe muſt be more perfect, than it is, or can poſſibly be in the other.

I conceive, what is here alledg'd, will amount to nothing, if it be true, (as hath been

been noted before) that however demonſtrable in themſelves ſeveral Particulars of what he calls Natural Religion may be, yet many Parts of it are not demonſtrable by the Generality of Men, and ſome may be aſſign'd which are not demonſtrable by any Man; That whilſt ſome Things, in themſelves fit and proper, are abſolutely undiſcoverable in the mere Uſe of our Reaſon, others require more Pains and Care than moſt Men are willing to lay out about them. Revelation therefore, tho' the Evidence of it ſhould not be ſtrictly demonſtrative; yet as it gives us an Inſight into ſome Things not at all diſcoverable by our Natural Reaſon, muſt of Conſequence make the Diſcovery of a proper Rule of Life more perfect. To which we may add, That while it ſaves us the Trouble of tedious Reaſoning, and long Deduction, the Diſcovery muſt be made with greater Diſpatch and Eaſe. And tho' to build on ſuch a traditional Revelation, is not to build on ſtrict Demonſtration; yet if the Evidence in this Caſe be as perfect as the Nature of the Thing will admit of, we ſhall have no more Cauſe to doubt concerning the Certainty of the Evidence, than we have to queſtion the Force of Demonſtration.

But, admitting that probable Evidence may be in ſome Caſes abundantly ſufficient, yet our Author objects, Secondly, that in the

preſent Inſtance the Point labours under extraordinary Difficulties. Several groundleſs Pretences to Revelation have been confidently inſiſted on in ſeveral Ages of the World; and have ſucceeded ſo far, as to gain Credit from a conſiderable Part of Mankind.

I am ſurpriz'd that this Gentleman ſhould lay ſuch Streſs on an Objection, which hath been ſo often anſwer'd, without endeavouring to ſupport it by making the leaſt Reply to Matters offer'd in Bar of this Objection. Let us ſuppoſe that there have been as many Pretences to Revelation, as he pleaſes; Doth it follow, that theſe Pretences muſt all of them be alike? If there have been many Impoſtures, can there be no ſuch Thing as Truth in the World? Or, if ſeveral Men have made groundleſs Claims to a Divine Authority, can there be no real Ground of Divine Authority at all? One might be rather apt to conclude the contrary, and to think that if there had never been any Divine Revelation, Men would not have been ſo forward either on the one hand to make Pretences of this Kind, or, on the other, to give Credit to them. For, as Falſhood always ſuppoſes ſome Truth, ſo Impoſture cannot ſucceed unleſs it puts on the Appearance of that which is, or hath been real.

To take the Objection in another Light; I will ſuppoſe it is deſign'd, not ſo much to prove that there never hath in Fact been any

any Divine Revelation, as to ſhew the Difficulty of forming a Judgment about the Reality of a particular Revelation. The Difficulty ariſes from hence, that "there "never was a Time or Place where ſome "Divine Revelation was not believ'd, and "its Votaries equally confident that their's "was a true Revelation." But what, after all, can be concluded from this? Why, juſt thus much, and no more, that Men are very often lazy, unapt to think for themſelves, and ready to give Credit to every confident Aſſertor. This is indeed true, and muſt not be conteſted. But then the Queſtion is, not what Men may be apt ſometimes to do, but what they are capable of doing on ſuch Occaſions. The Queſtion is, not whether indolent Men will give Ear to bold Pretenders, rather than examine their Pretences; but, Whether they have any ſufficient Abilities to diſtinguiſh between Reality and Impoſture. This, I preſume, they may do, if they pleaſe; eſpecially ſince the Point to be conſider'd is a Point of Fact, concerning which, in other Inſtances, we find Men are ſagacious enough, and not ſo liable to err, whilſt they give themſelves proper Pains.

After all, if our Author thinks there is really any Thing ſo formidable in the Objection, and that Men cannot diſtinguiſh between a real Divine Authority and a pre-

tended one, amidſt ſuch a Variety of Pretences, let me deſire him to ſhew, how they are capable of judging concerning philoſophical and abſtract Reaſoning. Is it ſo much eaſier to go thro' a long Train of perplex'd Arguing, than to determine concerning the Probability of Facts, to which Men were not themſelves Witneſſes? Do we not ſee, in daily Experience, that Perſons, who having been unus'd to cloſe Thinking, can make out very few Matters that way, can yet relate Things with Exactneſs enough which they have done themſelves, and paſs very ſhrewd Judgments on the Truth or Falſhood, Probability or Improbability of Things affirm'd to have been done by others. And doth not our Civil State itſelf preſume them ſo capable of doing this, as to commit the Trial of ſuch Matters of Fact even to a Jury of ordinary Perſons? Where then is the Impoſſibility, or Difficulty, according to the common Senſe of the World, that ſuch Perſons ſhould judge rightly of the Pretences to Revelation, whilſt theſe Pretences are to be determin'd by the Evidence of Facts, concerning which they are allow'd to judge in civil Matters.

But, ſays our Author, This is not all; Several other Things are to be conſider'd: Difficulties will not only ariſe from the various and confident Pretences to Revelation, but likewiſe, Thirdly, from the Uncertainty

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of the Conveyance. Books may, in Tract of Time, be forg'd, or Paſſages corrupted: and How ſhall Men diſtinguiſh between the true original Revelation, and thoſe Corruptions which may have been made, or have in ſeveral Ages crept in?

It will be enough, in Reply to this, to alledge, That mere Poſſibilities are of no Moment in the Caſe: That if, on the one hand, it be affirm'd, ſuch Things *may be*; on the other, it may as well be ſaid, they *may not be*; That we are not now debating concerning abſolute Demonſtration, which admits no Poſſibility on the other Side, but only concerning Probability: To which it is no manner of Prejudice that Errors are poſſible; ſince poſſible, in the ſtrict Senſe of the Word, they muſt be; otherwiſe the Evidence would not be probable only, but abſolute.

Let our Author therefore call upon us as much as he pleaſes, to prove that our traditional Revelation is genuine, and that it hath ſuffer'd Nothing from Either Forgery or Corruption. On this Head we are not oblig'd to anſwer him at all. It is his Buſineſs to prove the Forgery or Corruption; or at leaſt to to ſupport his Point by Arguments as probable as thoſe are by which we evince the Revelation in general. If this be not done, we may ſafely preſume, that no Parts of what we receive as a Revelation

from God, have been really forg'd; and that no ſuch Corruptions have crept in, as ſhall make any material Difference in the Caſe.

But he preſſes us farther; and maintains, that Suſpicions of this Kind are well grounded; That the Perſons thro' whoſe Hands theſe Books have gone, have been eminent this way; and "that they were capable of any "pious Frauds, if we may judge by the "Number of Paſſages corrupted, and of "Books forged by them."

But how comes this Gentleman to know that any Books have been forg'd, or any Paſſages corrupted? Why, principally by this Means; that Perſons, capable of diſcovering the Fraud, have made it out to him. Very well: Upon this Foot ſuch Books and Paſſages are entirely given up by us; and when any Thing of the ſame Kind is equally prov'd of other Books or Paſſages, we ſhall as readily give them up too. But muſt we be ever ſuſpicious and doubtful, and admit Nothing as Truth, becauſe Some Falſhoods have been detected? I ſhould rather be tempted to think, that the Detection of ſuch Frauds gives us a Security, that other Books which concern our Religion, and againſt which no Objection can be made, are genuine. For the ſame Zeal and Honeſty, by which ſome Frauds have been detected, would equally have carry'd Men on to diſcover

cover others, had any others been indeed diſcoverable, or rather, had there been any others remaining.

I need not enter minutely into the ſeveral Methods by which Forgeries or Corruptions have been, or may be diſcover'd. The chiefeſt are, I conceive, Theſe; Either the Teſtimony of ancient Writers; — or, the Variety of ancient Copies; — or, the Nature of the Writings themſelves. Let all the Remarks which can be drawn from theſe Heads be applied, if this Gentleman pleaſes, on the preſent Occaſion. Let the Scriptures be try'd on this Foot. And let us ſee whether the Genuineneſs of theſe Writings can be defended, or no. If they cannot, I have no more to ſay. But if they can be defended, ſhall this Gentleman's groundleſs Preſumptions be taken for Proof? Shall it be ſufficient to ſay, In a long Tract of Time Corruptions may have crept in; and therefore You muſt prove They have not in Fact crept in? This, Sir, we are by no means bound to prove. No one can be put on proving the Negative in ſuch a Caſe as this. It is your Buſineſs to evince and ſupport your poſitive Side of the Queſtion; Otherwiſe, what you advance, muſt paſs for ſo many bold and groundleſs Aſſertions.

We have the more Reaſon to inſiſt on this, becauſe, from the very Nature of the Thing, it appears, that ſuch Forgeries or Corrup-

Corruptions could not have obtain'd Credit ſo univerſally, as to make the particular Detection of them either impoſſible or difficult. We do not lay the Streſs of the Point on This only, (as our Author pretends we do), " That no Change could be made in " our Religion in After-times; the Care " Men have of their own Souls, as well as " their natural Affection for their Poſterity, " obliging them, from Generation to Gene- " ration, to hand down their Religion as " they receiv'd it." p. 233. This is a Uſing us ill; and a Repreſenting us as affirming, not what we really do affirm, but what it is moſt for his Purpoſe we ſhould affirm. The real State of the Caſe is This; Numerous Copies of thoſe Writings, in which our Religion is contain'd, were immediately diſpers'd Abroad; They were kept as a ſacred Treaſure; They were read, and ſtudied with Care; Some of the principal Parts of them were conſtantly recited in the publick Aſſemblies of Chriſtians; They were tranſlated into a Variety of Languages; ſpread thro' the moſt diſtant Parts of the World; and Paſſages from them cited by numerous Writers: To which may be added, that there ſprung up, in the very earlieſt Ages, a Variety of Sects, which oppos'd and hated each other, and therefore were a conſtant Guard againſt Impoſture and Corruption from any hand. Now, if it ſhall appear, under all

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theſe Circumſtances, that the very ſame Books have thro' all Ages been generally admitted as Canonical; If theſe Books are, as to every Thing of Moment, the ſame in all the ſeveral Copies and Verſions; If the Texts cited from them by the ſeveral Writers, who built on their Authority, agree, as to the main, with theſe Copies; What can be concluded, but the Genuineneſs and Incorruptneſs of theſe Writings? He, who notwithſtanding theſe ſtrong Preſumptions, ſhall ſtill ſuſpect the contrary, muſt run himſelf on theſe monſtrous Abſurdities; That a great Part of Mankind have at once, in very remote Parts of the World, agreed in the Forgery, or Corruption; That they have agreed to deſtroy all the old Copies, and to forge new ones; to alter all the ſeveral Verſions which had been made of them; to corrupt Paſſages in a Variety of Authors, which likewiſe could not be done without altering the main Drift of the Books themſelves; And, (which is ſtill more incredible) that this ſhould be done by Perſons who hated and perſecuted each other, and who could not have brought either more Credit to their own Side, or Reproach on their Adverſaries, than by detecting ſuch Impoſtures. He who is capable of believing all this, muſt not complain of Credulity in others.

Our Author will proceed ſtill, and demand, How ſhall the common People determine upon

upon the Point? Are They able to have Recourſe to all theſe ſeveral Copies, and Verſions, *&c.* Do they underſtand the very Languages in which they are written? Or, if they did, Are They capable of forming any tolerable Judgment upon the Whole? If not, then "all Mankind, very few "excepted, are alike bound in all Places "to pin their Faith on their Prieſts, and "believe in Men, who have an Intereſt to "deceive them, and who have ſeldom fail'd "to do ſo when Occaſion ſerves?"

I ſhall make no Return for the Compliment here paid to the Prieſts, or to any other of thoſe unjuſt Reproaches which this Gentleman hath caſt on that Order of Men. I ſhall only obſerve, in reference to Prieſts, that whilſt he Abuſes them in one reſpect, as a Set of Knaves and Villains, he inſinuates ſomething too much to their Advantage in another. For to ſay, (as ſay it he does), "That Religion muſt carry ſuch internal "Marks of its Truth, as Men of mean Capa-"cities are able to diſcover; or elſe, —— "all Mankind, a very few excepted, are "alike bound, in all Places, to pin their "Faith on their Prieſts;" is, to make the Prieſts almoſt the only Perſons in the World of Senſe and Learning, and capable of judging concerning the external Evidence of a Revelation. This, I muſt confeſs, is an Honour which we cannot by any means lay

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Claim to. There are great Numbers amongſt the Laity of ſingular Parts and Learning; and we are oblig'd to theſe worthy Gentlemen for ſome remarkable Defences of our Religion. How then is it, upon this Suppoſition, neceſſary, that all Mankind, a few only excepted, ſhould pin their Faith on their Prieſts? What! is Nothing to be learn'd from any of the Laity? or, Are theſe Gentlemen content with judging for themſelves, without giving any manner of Aſſiſtance to others?

Well, but what of all this? If the Generality of Mankind cannot examine either theſe ſeveral Copies in the Original Language, or the ſeveral Verſions which have been made of them, *&c.* from whence the Incorruptneſs of the Scriptures may be prov'd, it is plain they muſt build on the mere Authority of other Men; they muſt pin their Faith on Men, whether Prieſts or Laity it matters not: And is this a Circumſtance to be admitted in ſo important a Matter as Religion?

The Points here are Matters of Fact; *viz.* Whether there really are numerous Copies of the Records of our Religion in the original Language; Whether there have been, and ſtill are ſubſiſting numerous Verſions of theſe Records; Whether a vaſt Number of Paſſages have been from Time to Time cited from them in Books which are ſtill extant; And Whether theſe do all of them ſo far agree as

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to ſhew the Genuineneſs and Incorruptneſs of theſe Records. Concerning theſe Points the greateſt Part of Mankind cannot ſearch for themſelves: They neither underſtand all the ſeveral Languages in which they are written; nor, if they did, have they ſufficient Opportunity to examine them perſonally, or to gain Aſſurance from their own immediate Searches. But what then! Can they have no ſufficient Aſſurance at all concerning Matters of this Nature? Are we to believe Nothing upon the Teſtimony of others? Are we not to be determin'd by the beſt Evidence which the Nature of the Thing, and our own Circumſtances will allow of? —— by ſuch Evidence, that we could not obtain greater in our preſent Condition, tho' the Thing itſelf were true? Muſt we inſiſt on Demonſtration where Nothing can be had but human Teſtimony; or deny all Weight to it, where we are unable to confirm it by our own Experience? If there have been ſome Impoſtures, yet is Knavery ſo eſſential to Human Nature, that all Men muſt on that account, be ſuſpected? To come more cloſe to the Point: Shall Nothing be allow'd to the General Reputation which Men have obtain'd for their Skill, and Integrity? —— to the Concurrence of many, nay of all who have examined into theſe Matters; —— of Perſons, tho' Prieſts, yet of different Communions, and willing to find as many Faults

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as they could with one another; —— nay, not only of Prieſts, but of the Laity likewiſe; and where there is not a ſingle Perſon, not even amongſt this Gentleman's diligent and quick-ſighted Acquaintance, who hath pretended to make out any one particular Inſtance of Impoſture, or any one important Corruption in the Sacred Writings? On ſuch a Foot as this I ſhould preſume the Matter is ſo thoroughly ſettled, that there can be none Occaſion, even for the Learned themſelves, to enter farther into the Enquiry. What is atteſted as a Fact by ſo many Perſons of Skill and Honeſty, and who had all the Inducements to croſs one another, had they any fair Occaſion of doing it, may ſurely be depended on. But theſe Facts once admitted, will immediately prove our Point; and of this Conſequence every Man can judge, who is capable of drawing any Concluſions at all.

There is a Fourth Branch of our Author's Objection ſtill remaining, *viz.* "That the Na-"ture of Probability itſelf is ſuch, that were "it only left to Time, even that would wear "it quite out." This Objection againſt the Evidence of a traditional Revelation he endeavours to ſupport, by referring us to Mr. *Craig*'s *Principia Mathematica Theologiæ Chriſtianæ*, and by a Citation from Mr. *Locke*'s *Eſſay*.

The Gentleman ſeems to lay ſo little Streſs on Mr. *Craig*'s Demonſtration, having only juſt

juſt referr'd to it, that I cannot think myſelf any farther concern'd than to obſerve, that this Subject hath likewiſe been handled in the *Philoſophical Tranſactions*, No. 359. Thither I ſhall in my Turn refer him. But as the Paſſage from Mr. *Locke* is introduc'd with an Air of Confidence, it may be proper to conſider it as here apply'd by this Gentleman.

" I think (ſays Mr. *Locke*) it may not be " amiſs to take Notice of a Rule obſerv'd " in the Law of *England*; which is, that " tho' the atteſted Copy of a Record be good " Proof, yet the Copy of a Copy never ſo " well atteſted, and by never ſo credible " Witneſſes, will not be admitted as Proof " in Judicature. This is ſo generally ap- " prov'd as reaſonable, and ſuited to the " Wiſdom and Caution to be us'd in our En- " quiry after material Truths, that I never " yet heard of any one that blam'd it. This " Practice, if it be allowable in the Deciſion " of Right and Wrong, carries this Obſerva- " tion along with it, *viz.* That any Teſti- " mony, the farther off it is from the origi- " nal Truth, the leſs Force and Proof it has. " The Being and Exiſtence of the Thing it- " ſelf is what I call the original Truth. A " credible Man vouching his Knowledge of " it, is a good Proof. But if another equally " credible do witneſs it from his Report, " the Teſtimony is weaker: And a third " that atteſts the Hearſay of a Hearſay, is

" yet

" yet leſs conſiderable: So that in traditi-
" onal Truths, each Remove weakens the
" Force of the Proof; and the more Hands
" the Tradition has ſucceſſively paſs'd thro',
" the leſs Strength and Evidence does it re-
" ceive from them. " *Locke's Eſſay*, L. 4. C. 16. §. 10.

What Mr. *Locke* hath here advanc'd is true and reaſonable: But our Author hath been pleas'd to apply it to a Purpoſe quite different from what Mr. *L.* intended, and for which it will by no means ſerve: So that, admitting what is here laid down as true in the Premiſes, we may deny all the Concluſions which our Author would deduce from them.

There are Two Things here aſſerted. 1. That, tho' the atteſted Copy of a Record be good Proof, yet the Copy of a Copy, never ſo well atteſted, and by never ſo credible Witneſſes, will not be admitted as Proof in Judicature. And, 2. That in traditional Truths in the general, each Remove weakens the Force of the Proof produc'd.

The Matter of Fact aſſerted under the firſt Article is admitted; And the Ground of this Proceeding in Civil Courts ſeems to be, That the Original Record, or an atteſted Copy is capable of being produc'd. In general, it is as eaſy to produce one of theſe, perhaps more ſo, than to get Evidence at a greater Remove from the Original. If this be true,

then why ſhould any ſuch diſtant Proof be offer'd? Muſt it not look as tho' ſome Art were intended to corrupt Matters, and to diſguiſe the Truth, when Men chuſe to ſtep ſo much out of the Way, and to offer remote Evidence, in Caſes where a nearer one may be had with greater Diſpatch and Eaſe? —— But, can any ſuch Reaſon be alledg'd in the preſent Caſe? Is it, in the Nature of Things, as poſſible and eaſy to produce the Originals, or atteſted Copies of the Scriptures, even ſuppoſing there is no Forgery or Corruption, as 'tis to do ſo in Matters which come before a Civil Court? If not, then theſe Two Caſes are vaſtly different; and a Rule which may be thought reaſonable in the one, will be unreaſonable and abſurd in the other.

After all, it muſt be allow'd, that, whilſt Men are fallible, and capable of acting wrong, abſolute Certainty cannot ariſe from human Teſtimony. Upon this Account we muſt allow likewiſe, that, in every Remove of traditional Truths, the Force of their Evidence is weaken'd: In Traditions by Hear-ſay, the Point is apparent at firſt Sight; and will be found to hold proportionably as to written Traditions. Suppoſing it therefore, in this View of Things, poſſible that Time itſelf may wear out all the Force of Proof depending on traditional Evidence, Can no Evidence,—— no Probability ariſe from Tradition at all? If in an Hundred Thouſand

Removes

Removes the Probability would be loſt entirely; Muſt it likewiſe be loſt in the Third or Fourth Remove? And yet this is perhaps the Caſe with reference to the Goſpel Tradition: Poſſibly ſome of the Copies ſtill remaining may have been taken from the very Originals themſelves: If not, yet it is not at all unlikely but they may have been Copies of Copies: Or, if we ſhould ſuppoſe them to have been taken at a much greater Remove from the Originals, yet ſtill Corruptions are not ſo eaſily introduc'd, where numerous Copies are diſpers'd: To which may be added, that theſe muſt eaſily betray or correct one another, in caſe of Corruption. So that, with regard to the Goſpel, I am perſuaded, notwithſtanding the gradual Decreaſe of Evidence in traditional Propoſitions, the Decreaſe is ſo very little, that it may, like the infinitely ſmall Quantities in Mathematicks, be rejected, as making no conſiderable Difference in the Point at all.

Upon the whole of what our Author hath advanc'd upon the Evidence of our traditional Revelation, as compar'd with the Evidence of his abſolutely perfect Law of Nature, we muſt obſerve, that the one may be clear'd up to the Satisfaction of any impartial Perſon, with much greater Eaſe and Certainty than the other; That the Evidence we inſiſt on, tho' not demonſtrative, is yet the higheſt which the Nature of the Thing will

admit of; is what cannot be reſiſted without throwing up all Evidence of diſtant Facts; and, which is more, without diſputing all Matters to which we ourſelves were not Witneſſes. He who can hold out here, may equally hold out againſt Demonſtration itſelf. His Incredulity is not owing to the Want of Evidence, but of a Diſpoſition to receive it.

The next Courſe of Arguing by which our Author would prove, That a proper Rule of Life is more eaſily diſcoverable by every Man in the Uſe of his Reaſon, than a traditional Revelation can make it, amounts to this; That the very Senſe and Meaning of the Revelation itſelf cannot be fix'd and aſcertain'd. What he advances to this Purpoſe, may be reduc'd to the following Heads: 1. That Words in any one Language are ſcarce poſſible to be tranſlated into another; becauſe, excepting Matters which immediately ſtrike the Senſes, the Words of one Language are not exactly anſwer'd by thoſe in another. 2. Becauſe the hyperbolical, parabolical, myſtical, allegorical, and typical Ways of Expreſſion familiar to Perſons in the Eaſtern Parts, are entirely diſagreeable to the Uſage of other Nations. And, 3. Becauſe we want ſuch an accurate Knowledge of the Manners, Cuſtoms, &c. of the Antients, as will enable us to underſtand their Writings.

I muſt, before I proceed farther, take Notice of one Thing, which properly belongs to this Head of Objections; and which, tho' it be not diſtinctly inſiſted on in this Place, is yet, in ſeveral others, urg'd with Confidence: It is this; That whatever the Language be in which a traditional Religion is expreſs'd, if it be not a univerſal Language, it muſt lay a great Part of Mankind under a Neceſſity of taking their Religion on the Authority of the Tranſlators.

But will the Gentleman ſay, we can have no ſufficient Aſſurance that a Tranſlation of any Book is made faithfully, if we are not acquainted with the Original Language, or have not examin'd it nicely? On this Foot, to what Purpoſe are any Tranſlations ever made at all? Or can we entertain any juſt Suſpicions concerning the Faithfulneſs of the Verſion, whilſt it paſſes uncontradicted by Men of eminent Skill in Criticiſm, and both able and willing to detect the Cheat, if any ſuch be attempted? Nay, more, whilſt there are Men, no Friends to the Religion itſelf, or the Perſons who embrace it, who would be forward enough to expoſe ſuch Practices, and could not but gain ſingular Advantages by informing the World, that the Religion taught, differs vaſtly from that which is ſaid to have been reveal'd originally? He who is capable, after all this, of entertaining Doubts concerning the general

Faithfulneſs of the Tranſlation, may doubt or diſpute any Thing.

However, admitting that if Tranſlations may be made faithfully, there may be ſufficient Aſſurance that they are ſo made; yet What if no Tranſlations whatſoever can be exact? Our Author affirms they cannot: and that, for this Reaſon, amongſt others, That the Words in any one Language, excepting Matters which immediately ſtrike the Senſes, are not exactly anſwer'd by Words in another.

What is affirm'd here, is void of the very Shew of Truth; and every one who knows any thing of different Languages can contradict him. Yet, ſuppoſing it true, I muſt obſerve to him, There is no manner of Occaſion that Tranſlations ſhould be verbal, or anſwer the Original exactly Word for Word. What is expreſs'd in one Language by one Word, may be anſwer'd in another Language by many Words: All the Ideas intended to be convey'd, may, in this way, be preſerv'd; and the Tranſlation be entirely juſt, tho' it ſhould be not literal.

But, 2. The Eaſterns, it ſeems, were much given to a bold and figurative Way of Writing: "They affected hyperbolical, para-
"bolical, myſtical, allegorical, and typical
"Ways of Expreſſing themſelves, as oppo-
"ſite to the Uſage in other Parts, as Eaſt
"is to the Weſt."

I wiſh

I wiſh our Author, when he urg'd this Objection, had drawn it out at full Length, and told us plainly how much he deſign'd ſhould be concluded from it. Would he have us infer, that the Writings of the Eaſterns muſt therefore be abſolutely unintelligible? Doth he think they were incapable of being underſtood by the Eaſterns themſelves, and in thoſe very Times in which they were compos'd? This, ſurely, will not be aſſerted, if this Kind of Writing was then uſual and familiar to them. Or, Doth he intend no more than this, That the Difference between the Eaſtern Way of Writing in thoſe early Times, and the Manner of Expreſſion now in Uſe with us, is ſo great, that no Man doth, or can underſtand what is meant? If this be what he intends, I muſt obſerve, That Difficulties will ſometimes ariſe from ſuch a bold and figurative Way of Expreſſion; but at the ſame time I muſt contend, and appeal to all the Learned for the Truth of what I maintain, That the general Meaning even of theſe figurative Writings is capable of being underſtood by the Skilful: And if it may be underſtood, then it muſt be capable of being truly render'd in modern Language. Difficulties, I muſt own, will ariſe as to the full Meaning and Import of particular Expreſſions: But then Difficulties are not Impoſſibilities. Even ſuch Expreſſions may be underſtood, and,

for the moſt part, have been underſtood, and rightly explain'd, by ſome one or other. And if Men have not equally ſucceeded in every Thing of this Kind, yet 'tis ſufficient that the main Drift and Deſign of the Writing is intelligible. This may anſwer the full Purpoſe of the Work; and then we need not concern our ſelves any farther.

The Objection before us is, I know, pointed at the Sacred Writings: In reference to which, and farther to ſhew the Weakneſs of the Objection, we may obſerve, That theſe Writings are of different Kinds, and relate to different Matters. Some of them are Prophetical; Some of them Hiſtorical; Some Poetical; Some Doctrinal; and Some Preceptive: And again, amongſt theſe, Some had a more immediate, if not a ſole Regard to the Perſons who liv'd in theſe more early Ages, as Others have a general Reference to all Men in all Ages.

That the Prophetical Parts ſhould be frequently expreſs'd in Figures, and in ſuch a Manner as not to be underſtood diſtinctly even by Perſons who liv'd in thoſe early Times, ought not to be wonder'd at; The very Nature of the Thing might ſometimes require it ſhould be ſo. And tho' the Accompliſhment of thoſe Predictions clear'd Things up to thoſe who liv'd when the Predictions were accompliſh'd, yet at this Diſtance of Time the Notice of ſeveral Matters

ters may be loſt, uſeful for the explaining them. Should this prove the Caſe, (as in ſome Inſtances it hath prov'd), I cannot ſee what Hurt ariſes. Many Prophecies are ſufficiently clear; and enough appears to confirm our Faith in the great Articles ſupported by them.

The Style of the Hiſtorical Parts is vaſtly different from that of the Prophetical. This, for the moſt Part, is plain and ſimple; and no great Matters of Difficulty can ariſe about it. Or, if there did, yet, as the main End of Revelation is to give us a Scheme of Virtue and Religion, and to enforce it on us in the moſt effectual Manner, all Objections ariſing from Difficulties in the Hiſtorical Style are of no Moment. For, the Queſtion at preſent is, Whether a Reveal'd Rule of Life can be, or in Fact hath been deliver'd in ſuch a Manner as to be plain and intelligible to thoſe Perſons for whom it was intended.

To paſs on; Other Parts of Scripture are Poetical, in which the Style, from the very Nature of the Thing, muſt be bold and figurative; and, conſequently, more remote from ordinary Apprehenſions than the ſimple and common Forms of ſpeaking. Yet, will any one maintain, that the Poetical Writings of the Ancients cannot be underſtood? Or, if they may, that they cannot be render'd truely in the Tranſlation? But, if this cannot be affirm'd, then, whatever Pains it may

may coſt the Tranſlators to render ſuch Writings in modern Language, yet, when they are once truely render'd, the main Difficulties are over. Beſides, that theſe Difficulties themſelves rather regard the Beauty and Elegance of the Expreſſion, than the principal Matters intended to be repreſented.

As to the Doctrinal and Preceptive Parts I muſt affirm, 1. From the Nature of the Thing, that, as ſuch Matters are capable of being repreſented clearly, ſo if the Supreme Being ſhould ever vouchſafe us a Revelation about them, ſuch would be ſet forth to us in a clear and intelligible Manner: For, no wiſe Law-giver ever chuſes to give us his Laws in Riddles. And, 2. That this hath prov'd ſo in Fact, with Reference to thoſe Matters which are delivered in Holy Scripture. This I ſhall content myſelf with affirming here, ſince the Point hath been ſo often clear'd in our Diſputes with the Papiſts.

Let our Author then talk, with as much Confidence as he pleaſes, of the hyperbolical, paraboliſcal, myſtical, allegorical, and typical Ways of Expreſſion, familiar to the Eaſterns, yet, if theſe are capable of being underſtood by others, in any diſtant Age, they muſt be capable of being render'd in modern Language and modern Terms. And the Objection is ſtill of leſs Moment, if Things expreſs'd in this Way are Matters in which our Faith and Practice are not concern'd; —— Matters

Matters which were proper to thoſe Times, when they might be, and eaſily were underſtood; Laſtly, Matters which rather try the Abilities of the Curious, than affect the Conduct of ordinary Believers. Such kind of Objections our Author himſelf would diſallow in any other Caſe than ours.

But, 3. It is objected againſt traditional Revelation, That we want ſuch an accurate Knowledge of the Manners, Cuſtoms, &c. of the Ancients, as will enable us to underſtand their Writings rightly.

As far as Things relate merely to Doctrines or Precepts, I cannot by any Means ſee how ſuch an accurate Knowledge of ancient Manners, Cuſtoms, &c. can be neceſſary. Truths which concern Men in all Ages, and Precepts which have the ſame Reference to all Men, in whatever Times they live, are not of ſuch a Nature as to depend on the peculiar Manners or Cuſtoms of any Age. I do in no wiſe deny, but it is poſſible to expreſs Matters with ſuch a View to the Cuſtoms peculiar to a certain Time, that the right Apprehenſion of them ſhall be exceedingly difficult in future Ages. But I do, and muſt deny, that this is abſolutely neceſſary and unavoidable: And conſequently, this is no manner of Objection againſt an ancient traditional Religion, merely as ſuch. Moral Truths have been ſet forth to us with the utmoſt Clearneſs, by the ancient Philoſophers; I mean, the Senſe and Import

port of their Precepts hath been clear, whatever Judgment we may be forced to paſs on thoſe Reaſonings by which they ſupported them. And what hath been ſo clearly expreſs'd by ſome, may be as plainly repreſented by others.

There are indeed Two or Three Things, eſpecially in ancient Writings, which may have a Reference to the Cuſtoms, *&c.* of thoſe Ages, and prove in a great meaſure inexplicable without a Skill that Way; *viz.* Precepts given with a ſpecial View to the Circumſtances of thoſe Times, tho' they may not poſſibly be unſerviceable in other Times: Reaſonings intended to draw Men to aſſent to certain Matters, or to comply with certain Precepts, built on ſome preceding Notions or Practices of that People: To which may be added, Occaſional Directions, built on ſomething either proper to the Perſon to whom they are given, or, at leaſt, to that Place and Age.

In all theſe, I conceive, we are not much concern'd. What, tho' we ſhould not be able to ſay, What might be the Occaſion of every Precept in the Jewiſh Law; to what Heathen Uſage it was oppos'd; or what Failing amongſt the Jews it guarded againſt? Doth it follow from hence, that we know not the very Senſe and Meaning of the Precept? What tho' we cannot make out clearly all the Reaſonings of St. *Paul* in his Epiſtles?

— Reaſon-

—— Reaſonings, no doubt, clear and full to thoſe Perſons for whom they were deſign'd; Is the Point concluded Therefore obſcure? May not the Propoſition he would inculcate be clear enough, tho' we ſhould not comprehend the Force of thoſe Arguings whereby he combated the Prejudices of the Jews againſt it? And will not the Concluſion ſubſiſt on the Authority of the Apoſtle, tho' we ſhould not be able to make out exactly every Step in the Apoſtle's Argument? Once more; What tho' we ſhould not underſtand the Occaſions of thoſe Times, nor every particular Circumſtance relating to Men who then liv'd, ſo perfectly, as to account for every Paſſage in ancient Writings? Will it follow, that we cannot have any general and competent Knowledge of them at all? —— That we cannot underſtand any thing which is affirm'd or taught in them; —— That we cannot learn from them thoſe important Truths, or Precepts, which it was the Deſign of theſe Writings to record for common Uſe? There is no debating with Perſons who will ſeriouſly maintain ſuch extravagant Things as theſe.

Upon the whole; If God may reveal himſelf to us by a direct Action upon Men's Minds, of which He can give them as clear a Senſe as they have of their own Exiſtence: If ſuch a Revelation made directly and immediately to one, or a few Perſons, may be communicated by them to others, and confirm'd

firm'd as the Word of God by undoubted Proofs of Divine Authority, (as ſurely this is in the Nature of Things poſſible at leaſt); If a Revelation thus made and publiſh'd may be recorded in Writing, and deliver'd down from one to another in a traditionary Way: If there may be good Evidence that this traditionary Revelation hath been convey'd down in ſufficient Purity: If the Senſe and Meaning of ſuch a Writing may be ſufficiently underſtood and explain'd, as to all the great Ends intended to be ſerv'd by it: And, Laſtly, If Men, who are incapable of entering far into abſtruſe and metaphyſical Reaſonings, and conſequently cannot receive a moral or religious Rule on the mere Foot of Natural Reaſon, may yet have Evidence ſufficient to convince them, that this traditionary Revelation is the genuine Will of God, and what the Meaning and Import of it is; then, I conceive, the Point contended for in this Chapter is abundantly ſupported. I ſhall therefore paſs on to ſuch other Queſtions as naturally follow, and will receive Light from the foregoing Obſervations.

CHAP.

CHAP. VII.

Whether a Revelation be not expedient, in order to a more eaſy, more perfect, and more general Knowledge of the Rule of Life.

THE greateſt Part of what hath been offer'd hitherto is preparatory to this important Queſtion; on the right Deciſion of which the Credit of our whole Religion doth in a great Degree depend. And I have been the more full and particular on the foregoing Heads, purely with a View to this. Our Author ſees full well of what Moment the Points formerly diſcuſs'd muſt be; otherwiſe he would not have inſiſted on them ſo ſtrenuouſly; He would not have repeated Matters with relation to them ſo frequently; He would not have endeavour'd to make good his own Side of theſe ſeveral Queſtions with ſo much Art and Subtlety. He knew what he was doing; and that, upon the Foot he would have Revelation put, it could not poſſibly maintain itſelf. If

If the Law or Religion of Nature were abſolutely perfect; If it were immutable in that Senſe in which he contends it is; If it were perfectly and eaſily diſcoverable by every Man, even by thoſe of the meaneſt Capacities; If, Laſtly, it were more perfectly and more eaſily diſcoverable by them in the Uſe of Reaſon, than either the Proof or Meaning of a Revelation can be, then the Concluſion he would obtrude on us would be certain and unqueſtionable: A Revelation would then be ſuperfluous; it could ſerve no End or Purpoſe; would be utterly unworthy of God, and conſequently what we could not expect, and ought not to admit of: For this is moſt certain, that a perfectly Wiſe Being cannot act in vain.

On the other hand, If the Law or Religion of Nature, when rightly underſtood, be not abſolutely perfect; If it be not immutable in the Senſe by him contended for; If a proper Rule of Life be not diſcoverable by every one perfectly, and with Eaſe; and if it be not diſcoverable in greater Perfection, and with greater Eaſe, than the Evidence and Meaning of a Revelation can be; —— then we may claim the Liberty of making theſe Concluſions: God may give us a Law more perfect than the Law of Nature, ſtrictly ſo call'd, is; He may, without contradicting that Law, ſuperadd to it ſome Particulars; He may teach us the proper

proper Rule of Life, in a Way which ſhall give us a more full, clear, and eaſy View of it, than we could have gain'd in the mere Uſe of our Reaſon; And, Laſtly, He may order Matters ſo, that the Meaning and Evidence even of a traditional Revelation, ſhall be more clear and eaſy to us, than a moral Rule would be in the mere Exerciſe of our natural Faculties. If therefore the Matters before inſiſted on by me, are prov'd, (as I hope they have been), then a Revelation is not only poſſible, and conſiſtent with the Divine Attributes, but, on our Part, highly deſirable: And the Wiſhes of ſome of the wiſeſt Heathens, upon a ſtrict View of the Condition of human Nature, are a farther Confirmation of our Sentiments on this Head.

To this may be added, That this is not only deſirable, (as indeed every Kind of Good is, and muſt be), but likewiſe upon conſidering that we are moral Beings, originally capable of great moral Perfection, and intended for it by our wiſe Creator, it will appear, that this is highly fitting and proper; and what we might expect would, one time or other, be given us, when the giving it ſhould fall in with the general Government, and be conſiſtent with the grand Scheme of Things. This is the Point which I ſhall diſtinctly purſue in this Chapter, as far as it relates to the more eaſy, more perfect, and more general Knowledge of the Rule of Life;

which being diſpatch'd, I ſhall hereafter endeavour to evince the Expediency of a Revelation to enforce the general and uniform Obſervance of this Rule.

I ſhall not repeat at large what I have occaſionally noted heretofore concerning the Poſſibility of Revelation. It will appear at firſt ſight, that God may communicate his Will to us, by immediate Action, upon our Minds, with much greater Clearneſs and Certainty, than any one Man can convey his Sentiments to another, either by Words or Actions. But whether this be fit and proper to be done, is another Queſtion; and will be determin'd, by enquiring, Whether the Effect of a Revelation can be as well obtain'd in the ordinary Meaſures of Proceeding? If it may, a Revelation will be ſuperfluous; And we may argue againſt the Probability of any Thing in that Kind, juſt as Mr. *Locke* did againſt Innate Ideas. He alledg'd, That God hath given us natural Faculties, by which all our ſeveral Ideas of Senſation and Reflexion may be gain'd: It muſt therefore be ſuperfluous and unaccountable, to imprint theſe on us in our original Conſtitution, for the Acquiſition of which we have natural Faculties given us. In like manner, If a proper Rule of Life be as eaſily and perfectly diſcoverable by the Uſe of our Reaſon, as it can be by extraordinary Revelation, Then ſuch an extra-

extraordinary Revelation muſt be needleſs. On the other hand, If this be neither perfectly nor eaſily diſcoverable by any one, nor, in any conſiderable Meaſure, diſcoverable by moſt, in the ordinary Way, Then an extraordinary Information muſt be of high Importance; It muſt concern us, as much as it does to be fully inform'd of theſe Matters at all: For, nothing can be clearer than this, If we are concern'd to have any full Information of theſe Matters; and if this Information is not to be had in the ordinary Way; Then we are equally concern'd to have it given us in a Way extraordinary.

But, let me not be miſunderſtood here. When I affirm, that Men are concern'd to have an extraordinary Information of the Rule of Life, I mean, that ſuch an Information will be of vaſt Uſe and Importance to us. I would not be thought in anywiſe to affirm, that ſuch an Information is abſolutely neceſſary, or that Divine Juſtice is concern'd in giving it. This Attribute will be clear'd entirely from hence, That Men are accountable for their Actions, no farther than their Capacities of Knowledge, and Powers of Acting reach. In all thoſe Inſtances therefore, in which Men are left entirely to their natural Reaſon, they cannot be cenſurable whilſt they do their beſt. A Revelation indeed would be highly uſeful,

and give them Advantages which cannot be had any other way; It would enable them to do more Good to others, and to purchaſe a greater Happineſs to themſelves. But then we muſt remember, that Juſtice is not concern'd in the Diſtribution of Favours, but the rendering what is due. If therefore a Revelation, in the preſent Caſe, be not ſtrictly and properly a Debt, Then the Vouchſafing, or the With-holding it, as not being the Concern of Juſtice, muſt be refer'd to ſome other of The Divine Attributes.

Upon this View of the Matter, we muſt conſider Revelation as an Inſtance of Favour; as ſomething which, tho' it would conduce highly to our moral Perfection, yet could not be demanded as a Right: And therefore we muſt Enquire, Whether, upon this Foot, it will appear, that it was proper for God to grant it, and for us to expect it. To this Purpoſe, I ſhall conſider,

1. The Condition of the wiſer and better Part of Mankind; And, 2. —— of thoſe in lower Rank, and of meaner Abilities. Only before I proceed, this ought to be noted, That, in conſidering the State and Condition of Mankind, I have a View to That State only in which they ſubſiſt at preſent, or in which they have been for more than Three Thouſand Years paſt. This, probably, may have been very different from what it was before; and conſequently, thoſe

thoſe Arguments which may ſhew the Expediency of a Revelation in theſe Circumſtances, may not equally conclude for vouchſafing the ſame in the more early Ages.

In reference to the *former*, I muſt allow, That a proper Rule of Life may be diſcover'd in a good Degree. The Remains of ſeveral ancient Writers on the Subject of Morals, ſhew a great Reach this Way: And no doubt, but in this, as well as other Parts of Philoſophy, Abundance may be done, if Men are furniſh'd with competent Abilities, favour'd with ſufficient Opportunities, and willing to apply themſelves with Care: Much, I ſay, may be done under theſe Circumſtances, becauſe much hath been done in Fact. Yet it muſt be confeſs'd withal, That 'tis difficult to ſay exactly, how far mere uninſtructed Reaſon might have carry'd Men. Somewhat muſt be abated in the Argument drawn from Fact, and in Proof how much may be done this Way, from conſidering what hath been done by Heathens, becauſe we cannot be certain what Aſſiſtances theſe very Writers themſelves borrow'd from Revelation. To ſay Nothing here, of ſome Revelation probably made to the firſt Man, of a Rule of Morals, which might, notwithſtanding the Corruptions which gradually crept in, ſupply noble Hints; This is remarkable, That the Scheme of Morals contain'd in the Old Teſtament, is vaſtly older than any

Writings of the Heathen Philoſophers. Whether theſe might not be conſulted by thoſe inquiſitive Men, who omitted ſcarce any Means of Inſtruction in their Power; or, Whether many of the more important Precepts might not be propagated by the Jews diſpers'd in different Parts of the World, cannot be determined with abſolute Certainty. But, if either of theſe hath prov'd the Caſe, then the Precepts of Philoſophers have not been ſo much their own Growth, as ſome Men would perſuade us. They have been either directly taken from Revelation, or at leaſt ſuch Hints have been drawn from thence, as they have improv'd afterwards by the Force of Parts and Application. This, I ſay, probably hath been, or poſſibly may have been the Caſe.

However, as we are not able to determine this Point with Certainty, Let us ſuppoſe the utmoſt which our Adverſaries can demand; Let us ſuppoſe that the Philoſophers wrought every Thing out of their own Stock: Yet ſtill a Revelation would have been exceedingly uſeful even to ſuch Great Men as theſe, as well to render their Scheme of Morals more perfect and compleat, as to diſcover it with greater Readineſs.

Had the Scripture Morality been receiv'd by them as a Divine Revelation, could they poſſibly have err'd from Truth, as we frequently find they did? Could they have taught

taught certain Things as Virtues, or at leaſt as excuſable, which are vicious in a very high Degree, and ſome of them even monſtrous? Could they have been guilty of ſuch Miſtakes with Regard to our Conduct towards the Supreme Being? Could they have differ'd ſo much from one another about the ſocial Duties; or have given us ſuch lame Inſtructions in reference to ourſelves? Or, if we ſhould ſuppoſe that every Virtue of higher Moment, and more general Concern, was really taught by ſome one or other, (which I will not affirm poſitively was not the Caſe); yet how came it to paſs that the ſame was not equally taught by all? The Caſe ſeems to be plain enough: All had not equal Abilities to diſcover Truth; or they were not equally capable of apprehending the Ground of thoſe Diſcoveries which were made by others; or, they were not equally diſpos'd to attend and conſider, and conſequently to enter into the Reaſonings of their Predeceſſors: Or, if in ſome Points they might eaſily diſtinguiſh between Truth and Falſhood; yet Prejudice, Paſſion, and the like, prevented their judging rightly concerning other Matters: They had been us'd to think otherwiſe; and therefore could not diſcern the Force even of plain Arguments on that Side of the Queſtion they diſliked.

This hath been, and always will be the Caſe, where Men have nothing left to truſt to but themſelves. But would it have been ſo, had Men enjoy'd and acknowledg'd a Revelation? No, certainly: On this Suppoſition, an unerring Rule would have been before them: Perſons of ſuperior Parts and Sagacity would probably have trac'd moſt Precepts up to their original Principles: Or, if they ſhould be incapable of this, yet the Authority of the Revelation muſt have overrul'd their Doubts: If corrupt Nature ſhould have biaſs'd them another Way, and turn'd them out of the Paths of Obedience, yet the Rule would have ſtill remain'd: The Scheme of Morality would have been ſtill the ſame; and acknowledg'd even by thoſe Perſons who car'd not to comply with it. Such then are the Advantages of a Divine Revelation, with regard to Perſons of ſuperior Rank and Abilities.

But there is another Thing behind, which may ſhew the Uſefulneſs of Revelation, even ſuppoſing that Men were capable of making the full Diſcovery of a moral Rule on the Foot of Reaſon; and that is, it would have render'd ſuch a Diſcovery more plain and eaſy, and have led Men into juſt Notions of Things with much greater Quickneſs and Diſpatch.

I think this is too clear to admit Diſpute, where the Revelation is Original and Immediate:

diate: For to aſſert the contrary, would be the ſame as to maintain, That 'tis eaſier to purſue a Demonſtration thro' a long Series of Proofs, than 'tis to perceive that Self-evident Principle on which it muſt at laſt be founded. I ſhall therefore, without enlarging on a Point ſo clear, chuſe rather to obſerve ſomewhat concerning Traditional Revelation.

I have noted in my laſt Chapter, That notwithſtanding all the Diſadvantages which may be ſuppos'd to attend a traditional Evidence, yet Proof of that Kind may be ſufficient to determine any reaſonable and impartial Man; I have noted farther, That ſuch Evidence may be judg'd of by Men of ordinary Abilities; and that Perſons of that Character are more capable of determining concerning Facts, than concerning abſtract and perplex'd Reaſonings. The Objection therefore againſt the traditional Revelation of a proper Rule of Life, built on This, that 'tis eaſier to fix this Rule on the Foot of Reaſon, than to judge concerning the Evidence of a traditional Revelation, hath no Force at all.

To this I ſhall beg Leave to add here, That Revelation hath one ſpecial Advantage, *viz.* That by Settling this One Point, every Thing elſe is ſettled of Courſe. As the Divine Authority is ſupreme, it muſt overrule every Objection: And therefore, when we are once ſecure that any Particular is commanded by God, we have nothing left

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us but to obey. On what Foot is it, I would deſire to know, that we are, ſtrictly ſpeaking, oblig'd to act agreeably to the Rules of Reaſon, and to purſue thoſe Things which appear to be fit and proper? Is it not, becauſe by doing ſo, we obey the Will of God? For, if God's Will were entirely out of Queſtion, however we might be concern'd on ſeveral Occaſions to act in Point of Prudence, yet we could not be properly oblig'd; Nothing would, in ſuch a Caſe, be Matter of ſtrict Duty. If this be true, then the Exerciſe of our natural Reaſon is but one Way in which the Will of God is diſcoverable; and conſequently, if there be any other Method, in which it may be diſcover'd with greater Eaſe, this Method will have a vaſt Advantage over the other.

Now the Difference between them lies in this; He who builds merely on human Reaſon, muſt have a diſtinct Proof of every Article in Morality: He muſt trace every Thing back to its firſt Principles: And tho' we ſhould allow, that all moral Precepts are reſolvable at laſt into one or two general Rules, which Rules may be obvious enough; yet 'tis no ſuch eaſy matter to carry Things back ſo far: It will require much Time, and great Attention. On the other hand, by evincing the Revelation, the Whole is prov'd at once: Every Precept contain'd in it will be a Part of our Duty; We need not

enquire into the natural Ground and Reaſon of the Precept: God's Will muſt be the Rule of our Actions; which being once fix'd this Way, we have nothing left but to examine the Record, and to act agreeably. In ſhort, a Revelation, with regard to the Rule of Life, is, when compar'd with a particular Inveſtigation of every Precept, much the ſame as a general Demonſtration in Mathematicks, compar'd with the particular Demonſtrations of each Caſe; it ſets the whole before us at once, and ſaves us the Trouble of minute and particular Enquiries.

Having thus offer'd ſome Obſervations on the Uſefulneſs of a Revelation to the wiſer and better-inſtructed Part of Mankind, I ſhall now, in the *ſecond* Place, conſider its Uſefulneſs with reſpect to Perſons of lower Rank, and meaner Abilities.

Every Thing which hath been alledg'd above, will equally conclude here; For moſt certainly, if Advantages may be deriv'd from hence, even to Perſons of the beſt Capacity, the ſame, or rather greater, muſt ariſe to thoſe of lower Senſe and meaner Attainments. Such Perſons (as I have had Occaſion to obſerve frequently) cannot carry Matters very far on the Foot of Reaſon: And therefore, to talk as if all Men were equally capable of doing all Things, is to treat human Nature differently from what it can

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in Fact admit of. It ſuppoſes that Men are really more perfect than they are; and is the very ſame Abſurdity, as it would be to meaſure the Abilities of Brutes by the Abilities of Men.

If this be the Caſe, then How will the Gentleman inculcate his Scheme of Morality, (however perfect we ſhould ſuppoſe it), on the Generality of Mankind? Not, I preſume, in the Way of human Terror: This will be, in his Account of Things, Perſecution. And beſides, if the Order of the World ſhould require, that the Precepts of Morality be enforc'd by the Execution of Penalties, yet it ſhould be remember'd, that this rather ſerves to guard the Good, than entirely to reclaim the Vicious. A Man may be very bad in himſelf notwithſtanding his outward Actions are reſtrain'd: The inward Principle may ſtill remain untouch'd, and ready to betray itſelf as often as Men can act with Safety; as often as they can either conceal their Crimes, or bribe Juſtice, or evade, or reſiſt it.

It remains that we enquire, What can be done by Inſtruction or Authority: Theſe, we allow, are of ſome Conſequence; But if, after all, they ſhall be found defective, and inſufficient for the Purpoſe before us, we muſt carry the Matter farther.

1. Then let us ſee, What may be done on the Foot of Inſtruction. This doubtleſs

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may be ſerviceable: It may ſuggeſt Things which would not otherwiſe have been thought of: And Mens Ideas may be ſo order'd this way, that Concluſions ſhall appear in a very ſtrong Light, which would not have been diſcern'd without ſuch Aſſiſtance. This is ſeen in the ſeveral other Sciences, or Arts of Life; and therefore might reaſonably be expected in the preſent Caſe likewiſe.

Yet, whenceſoever it hath come to paſs, the great and important Affair of Morality hath been neglected exceedingly. The Prieſts amongſt the *Gentiles* concern'd themſelves only about the Forms of Worſhip, which they attended with Care enough; whilſt the proper Rule of Life was untouch'd by them; and the lower Part of the World, who moſt needed Aſſiſtance, were left to ſearch out their Duty in ſuch ways as they could find.

It muſt not indeed be deny'd, but there have been in ſeveral Ages ſome Perſons of a noble Temper; Men who have purſued this great Subject with Diligence, and erected Schools, in which they endeavour'd to communicate their Diſcoveries. Something might be expected from hence. However, it is obſervable, that as there were a few Perſons only who undertook this Work, ſo the Effects muſt be confin'd within narrow Bounds. Their Inſtructions were uſeful to their Scholars; But what could this avail

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others who wanted the Advantage? The Method, however excellent in itſelf, was of little Service, whilſt not one in a Thouſand could reap any Profit from it.

But perhaps it will be ſaid, The preſent Queſtion doth not relate to the Inſtruction of former Times: This may have been, and probably hath been, too much neglected. This was the Fault of Men, and doth not argue any Defects in the Method. But may not Things be put on a better Foot? May not the good Effects of Inſtruction be render'd more general under proper Regulations? And the Cauſe of Virtue be ſufficiently provided for, if due Care be taken? Let us ſuppoſe this done: Then the Point will reſt on the Sufficiency of the ſeveral Inſtructors, and the Capacity, Leiſure, and other Qualifications of the Perſons to be inſtructed.

The Inſtructors muſt proceed in the Way of Reaſon; muſt point out the Natures of Things, the Relations they have to one another, and the moral Precepts which will ariſe from thence. In theſe Perſons therefore it muſt be requir'd, that they have not only a full View of ſuch Matters, but likewiſe the Art of communicating their Knowledge, and of repreſenting it in a proper Light to others. Yet is this really the Talent of every Man, who hath good Senſe enough to order his own Searches? Is every one who may be capable of Learning, capable

ble likewiſe of Teaching; —— of expreſſing himſelf clearly; and of adapting himſelf to the Underſtanding of his Hearers? It is very obſervable, that Men who poſſeſs the greateſt Share of Learning themſelves, are not always the moſt happy in ſhewing it. Thoſe who ſee the Agreement or Diſagreement of Ideas, diſcern it ſometimes at ſuch a Diſtance, as others, who have a leſs quick Senſe of Matters, could never have diſcern'd it at all. Theſe paſs over many of the intermediate Ideas as unneceſſary to be diſtinctly noted; and therefore, when they come to explain Things to Perſons of inferior Abilities, are perfectly unintelligible.

Or, if this ſhould not prove the Caſe; If the Teacher ſhould order his Thoughts in the moſt regular Way, and diſpoſe Things ſo as will be moſt apt to beget a right Senſe in the Hearer; yet ſtill Ideas cannot be convey'd immediately from one Man to another: They muſt be expreſſed and repreſented by Words. This draws on another Thing, and ſhews the Neceſſity of a Skill in Language. Yet is This a Talent, which every one poſſeſſes in that Degree of Perfection, which may enable him to convey his Thoughts Clearly and with Readineſs?

To this may be added farther, That ſuch a Teacher ought to have a good Inſight into human Nature; I mean, not only a general View of the Genius and Temper of Mankind,

kind, but likewiſe ſome Acquaintance with the particular Abilities, Ways of Thinking, Conſtitutions and Inclinations of his ſeveral Hearers. Without this, his beſt Inſtructions muſt many times miſcarry. For, there is a conſiderable Difference between ſpeculative Teaching, and moral. In the former, where no Paſſions are concern'd, plain Reaſons, when laid in a proper Order, and expreſs'd in fitting Language, may prevail: But, in moral Matters, where Men labour, perhaps, under ſtrong Prejudices, and are embaraſs'd by inward Paſſions, many Difficulties will ariſe. In this Caſe the skilful Teacher will find himſelf concern'd to adapt his very Reaſons to the Temper and Condition of the Perſon he would inſtruct; to expreſs them in ſuch a Manner, and to ſet them in ſuch a Light as ſhall give them the greateſt Weight with him; ſhall create Attention; ſhall obviate Prejudices; ſhall engage his Liking; and, at length, gain his Aſſent. All theſe ſeveral Qualifications, as well as others which might be inſiſted on, are neceſſary on the Part of that Inſtructor, who would endeavour, on the mere Foot of Reaſon, to argue Men into their Duty.

Yet all this will avail Nothing, unleſs the Hearers likewiſe are properly diſpos'd to be inſtructed. Something ſurely is needful on their Part; and without which every Thing the Teacher can offer muſt be ineffectual.

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Now the Firſt which occurs is This; They muſt be ready and willing to learn. Inſtruction cannot be forc'd on any Man. He may, if he pleaſes, ſhut his Eyes, and refuſe to ſee: which if he ſhould do, Objects will preſent themſelves in vain.

It is requiſite, in the next Place, that the Learner be attentive, diligent, and conſtant. Without ſomewhat of Attention, nothing will be perceiv'd but firſt and ſelf-evident Truths; Without Diligence there is no carrying on an Enquiry thro' a great Variety of Particulars: And, without Conſtancy, all thoſe Concluſions which demand repeated Pains, and Conſideration, muſt eſcape him.

Let us ſuppoſe, however, (tho' it doth not prove the Caſe frequently,) that Men are as attentive, diligent, and conſtant as You pleaſe; yet foraſmuch as, in the preſent Way, every Thing muſt be done by Dint of Reaſon, there is one Thing farther neceſſary, *viz.* That Men have a Sufficiency of Parts and Abilities. It is difficult to ſay how far Men are furniſh'd in this reſpect, by Nature; and what might have been built on the native Stock, if every Thing had been rightly order'd in the Beginning. Thus much, however, will be allow'd me here, That all Men are not upon an exact Level; that Some have a much greater natural Diſcernment, and quicker Uſe of their reaſoning Faculties, than others have; and

conſequently, are capable of thoſe Improvements, which cannot be attain'd by others with their utmoſt Care. But however the Matter relating to Mens original Parts ſhall prove, it is certain, that in every Part of Life, Mens Capacities will be proportion'd to the State and Condition in which they have liv'd, and the Uſe they have made of their Faculties. Thoſe who have been train'd up in an advantageous Manner, may be capable of great Things; whilſt thoſe, who have either been neglected, or had a wrong Turn given them, may loſe their very natural Vigour. It happens in ſome ſort to the Mind as to the Body: Its Powers are capable, by different Management, of being heighten'd or impair'd to almoſt any Degree aſſignable; and the Man ſhall, on theſe Accounts, act either vaſtly above, or as exceedingly beneath himſelf.

Theſe Things being premis'd, I muſt obſerve, that, in order to carry Matters of Morality to any conſiderable Height on the mere Foot of Inſtruction, we muſt ſuppoſe that the Perſons to be inſtructed have not only an original Fund of Parts, but likewiſe that Nothing hath been loſt thro' Negligence or Miſmanagement: We muſt ſuppoſe that the Generality of Men have been exercis'd in a rational Way, and train'd up to argue, and collect a Truth from a long Train of Inferences. Without this it will be vain to deal

deal with them in the preſent Method: For Arguments have no Manner of Force, where Men want Senſe and Capacity to underſtand them.

To this let me add, that foraſmuch as many Concluſions of a moral Kind are difficult to be made out in a tedious Courſe of Reaſoning, it is requiſite that the Perſons to be taught this Way ſhould have Leiſure and Opportunity for ſuch Reſearches. For, the Abilities of Men can ſignify little, if Buſineſs of another Kind ſhall take up their Time; if the neceſſary Employments of Life ſhall divert them; and prevent their Application to thoſe Matters, to which they may be equal as to Capacity, and led by Inclination.

Now, if it cannot be expected that there ſhould be a competent Number of Inſtructors, who have a full View of moral Matters: If thoſe who have ſuch a View may yet be unhappy in repreſenting Things; may want either Propriety of Method, or Clearneſs of Expreſſion, or the right Manner of addreſſing themſelves to the Capacities and Tempers of Men: —— And, if the Perſons to be inſtructed ſhall really prove (what we find the Generality of Mankind are in Fact) backward to learn, inattentive, lazy, inconſtant: If, beſides this, they ſhall want the Capacity for cloſe Reaſoning, whether from a Defect of natural Parts, or of a

proper Education; or be ſo fully employ'd in the common Affairs of Life, as to have no Leiſure for deep Study and Reflection; If any, and much more, if all theſe Caſes happen frequently, I may conclude with Safety, that the Method of Inſtruction will be of itſelf inſufficient to inculcate a compleat Rule of Morality.

I am aware of an Objection which may be thought to ariſe here. It may be ſaid, If there be any Force in this Kind of Arguing, it will equally conclude againſt the Sufficiency of Chriſtian Inſtruction, as that which is purely Moral; againſt inculcating Chriſtian Duties on Chriſtian Principles, as Moral Duties on the Principles of Human Reaſon; and conſequently, againſt the Uſefulneſs of the Chriſtian Prieſthood itſelf.

Upon which it ſhould be obſerv'd, That I do by no means affirm, No Good whatſoever can be done this Way: I am far from maintaining, that Inſtruction muſt be abſolutely uſeleſs, and conſequently, to be laid aſide entirely. Whilſt Men had Nothing elſe to depend on, they were concern'd to make the moſt of This; and to Something of this Kind, to domeſtick Inſtitution principally was it owing, that there were any Footſteps of Virtue and Religion in the World. All that I have aſſerted in the foregoing Argument is only This; That the preſent Method, however ſerviceable it may be in

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ſome reſpects, muſt be inſufficient to inculcate a perfect and compleat Syſtem of Morality; That there are frequently ſuch Defects on the Part both of the Teacher and the Learner, as muſt render this Method ineffectual: And therefore, ſince the Generality of Mankind are incapable of learning a proper Rule of Life this Way, they may wiſh and hope for it in ſome other.

A Divine Revelation is the Method I have now in View. This, we affirm, God hath been pleas'd to grant us in Fact: Yet, notwithſtanding this, the Uſefulneſs of Inſtruction is by no means ſuperſeded. If this was in a great meaſure ineffectual before, becauſe many Perſons are incapable of being taught in the Way of Argument; yet, ſince God hath been pleaſed to declare his Will, the State of Things is alter'd. On the preſent Foot, the Buſineſs of an Inſtructor is vaſtly different from what it was formerly. The Doctrines and Duties of Religion are now laid down in Scripture; and to be prov'd by the Teacher, not by running Matters back, in an argumentative Way, to the Natures and Reaſons of Things, (of which the Generality of the World cannot judge ſufficiently), but by ſhewing that they are contain'd in the Word of God. This makes all other Kinds of Arguing needleſs: For, Divine Authority is ſupreme and indiſputable.

To return: I have endeavour'd to ſhew above, That the Cauſe of Virtue cannot be provided for ſufficiently on the mere Foot of human Inſtruction: For this requires ſuch Advantages, as the greateſt Part of Mankind are by no means Maſters of. But then it will be ſaid, that thoſe who are incapable of being ſufficiently taught this Way, may yet be influenc'd by the mere Credit and Authority of their Teachers; and conſequently, that the Reputation of the One may ſupply all the Defects of the Other.

This may, perhaps, be ſaid, as there is hardly any Thing but ſome one or other is capable of affirming. Yet, is there any Probability in the Thing? Is it found that Men are ſo very humble and modeſt, and willing to give Way to others in thoſe Points in which they are leaſt capable of judging for themſelves? Doth not Experience ſhew, that Men are obſtinate and perverſe in proportion to their Ignorance; conceited of thoſe very Abilities they want; and apt to preſume they know Every Thing, merely for this Reaſon, that they know Nothing?

Somewhat might be alledg'd to this Purpoſe, and the Propoſal would be plauſible enough, if Men thoroughly knew themſelves; if they were conſcious of their own Defects; and ready to borrow that Aſſiſtance from others, which the Circumſtances they are placed in make neceſſary. But, whoſoever reckons

reckons upon this, muſt betray his Ignorance of the real State of the World. Men, eſpecially the lower Part of them, are conceited, proud, ſelf-will'd, obſtinate. How are ſuch Perſons as theſe to be influenced by mere human Authority?

Or, if it ſhould be ſuppos'd, they might give ſome Way to others, or take their Word for Matters in which they have no manner of Concern; If they ſhould credit them in their ſeveral Profeſſions, or thoſe Arts or Sciences to which they have had no Opportunities of applying themſelves; yet we ſhall find the Caſe is different, when we come to give them Directions about their own Conduct and Behaviour. Here they will be apt to think No Man whatſoever hath a Right to preſcribe to them; that as all Men are by Nature equal, ſo every Man is to give a Law to Himſelf; and that each Man for himſelf is beſt capable of doing this, not only becauſe he is moſt ſenſible of his own Pleaſures or Pains, but likewiſe becauſe he is more intereſted in the Conſequences of his own Actions than any one elſe can be.

Let us ſuppoſe however, that this Difficuly were gotten over; Let us imagine that there were no ſuch Principles of Self-conceit and Perverſeneſs in Mankind, as we ſee in Fact there are; —— that they were conſcious of their Defects, and willing to ſubmit themſelves to the Directions of wiſer Men; How,

I deſire to know, will Matters ſtand on this Suppoſition?

Why, Things will be manag'd rightly enough, if another Suppoſition can be juſtly made, *viz.* That all theſe ſeveral Inſtructors ſhall have the ſame View of moral Matters, and teach juſt one and the ſame Thing. But, if this ſhould not prove the Caſe, (as it never yet hath prov'd ſo) then another Difficulty will ariſe, *viz.* How to make a proper Choice of the Teacher: Is This to be left to each Man's private Diſcretion? or is it to be determin'd by ſome higher Power?

If the later Point be affirm'd, then poſſibly the Teacher, however he may be qualified for the Work he undertakes, may yet be unacceptable; may loſe his Credit and Authority with thoſe he ſhould preſcribe to; and conſequently, his Precepts may become entirely fruitleſs and ineffectual. For, this is certain, If the Effect of his Precepts muſt depend on his Authority, they can have no greater Force than what his Authority gives them; which depending likewiſe on the Opinion Men have of him, a Regard muſt be always had to ſuch an Opinion.

On the other Hand; If, to avoid the Inconveniences ariſing from hence, it be affirm'd, that each Man muſt chuſe for himſelf, then a new Set of Difficulties will preſent themſelves. For, I beg to know, whether thoſe who moſt want Direction, are the fitteſt Judges of the Abilities

Abilities of a Director? Do Theſe Perſons know ſo exactly the Integrity and Skill of thoſe they apply to? Will they not from hence be laid under the unhappy Chance of making as well a bad Choice as a good one? Or rather, will they not be apt to lean too much to the wrong Side, and to chuſe the Perſon rather who favours their Inclinations, than him who would lead them through the difficult Paths of Virtue? This is not only in itſelf poſſible, but probable. And, if it ſhould once prove the Caſe, muſt be attended with this farther Conſequence, that the Errors they are brought into by this Means, muſt be entirely without Remedy. Where Men give themſelves up entirely to Authority, that Authority ought ſurely to be infallible; becauſe, if it ſhould lead them wrong, they can have Recourſe to Nothing farther for Direction. As their Errors are unavoidable, ſo the Corruptions ariſing from theſe Errors muſt be incurable.

After all, it muſt be own'd, That our Author is not at all affected by what I have advanc'd here. He does by no means maintain that Human Authority is to be regarded in the preſent Caſe: Every Thing is referr'd by him to each Man's own private Senſe: And he carries the Matter ſo far as to exclude the Divine Authority itſelf. Let us ſée what he advances to this purpoſe, p. 186. "If you "are to be govern'd by [Revelation,] that

" ſuppoſes you muſt take every Thing upon " Truſt; or merely becauſe it is ſaid by " thoſe for whoſe Dictates you are to have " an implicit Faith: For, to examine into " the Truth of what they ſay, is renouncing " their Authority: As, on the contrary, if " Men are to be govern'd by their Reaſon, " they are not to admit any Thing farther " than as they ſee it reaſonable. To ſup- " poſe both conſiſtent, is to ſuppoſe it con- " ſiſtent to take and not to take Things on " Truſt. To receive Religion on Account " of Authority, ſuppoſes, that if the ſame " Authority promulgated a different Reli- " gion, we ſhould be oblig'd to receive it. " And indeed, it is an odd Jumble, to prove " the Truth of a Book by the Truth of the " Doctrines it contains, and at the ſame " Time conclude thoſe Doctrines to be true, " becauſe contained in that Book. And " yet, this is a Jumble every Man makes, " who contends for Mens being abſolutely " govern'd, both by Reaſon and Authority."

This Paſſage muſt be conſider'd; becauſe, if our Author's Poſition in this Place be true, *viz.* That we are not to be govern'd by any Authority whatſoever, —— no, not by the Authority of God himſelf, all that we can offer concerning the Weakneſs of human Reaſon will ſignify Nothing: It may ſhew indeed the Unhappineſs of Man, but cannot point out the Remedy. This cannot prove that

that a Revelation is needful, becauſe, on this Suppoſition, a Revelation muſt be unſerviceable.

Our Author's preſent Argument is built on a ſuppos'd Inconſiſtency between being govern'd by Reaſon, and being govern'd by Revelation: "If we are govern'd by Reve-" lation, (ſays he) we muſt take every " Thing upon Truſt; —— and this ſuppoſes, " that if the ſame Authority promulgated a " different Religion, we ſhould be oblig'd " to receive it." On the other Hand, if we are to be govern'd by our Reaſon, "we are " to examine into the Truth of what [is ſaid] " and not to admit any Thing farther than " we ſee it reaſonable. To ſuppoſe both " conſiſtent, is to ſuppoſe it conſiſtent to take " and not to take Things on Truſt."

One Thing I muſt obſerve, before I proceed to the diſtinct Examination of what our Author alledges here, *viz.* Altho' the Authority concerning which he is here ſpeaking be *Divine* Authority, —— the Authority of Revelation; yet this Writer hath ſo artfully manag'd Matters in the Progreſs of his Argument, as poſſibly to deceive his Readers into a Belief, that he is only contending againſt abſolute *Human* Authority. "That [*i. e.* —— the being govern'd by Revelation,] " ſuppoſes you muſt take every Thing up-" on Truſt; or merely becauſe it is ſaid by " thoſe for whoſe Dictates you are to have an " im-

" implicit Faith. " If the Gentleman had expreſs'd himſelf in this Manner, " Becauſe " it is affirm'd by God, who cannot deceive, " or be deceived, " no Inconveniencies could ariſe from taking Things on ſuch a Truſt. But this would not have ſerv'd his Purpoſe: He therefore takes another Way, and endeavours to lead his Readers off from the true Point in Queſtion.

But to the Point itſelf. In Oppoſition to our Author's Aſſertions in this Argument, I ſhall endeavour to ſhew,

1. That there neither is, nor poſſibly can be, any Inconſiſtency between Reaſon and Revelation; or, between Things known by human Reaſon, and taught by Divine Revelation. And

2. That an abſolute Submiſſion to both is poſſible and proper. Under this later Head I ſhall clear Matters from the ſeveral Difficulties which our Author alledges.

Reaſon is that natural Faculty, in the Uſe of which we perceive the Evidence of certain Truths: And Revelation is that extraordinary Act of God, by which certain Truths are impreſs'd upon us, or manifeſted to us. Now, there cannot be any more Inconſiſtency between theſe, than there can be between real Truths themſelves. Truths are the Objects both of Reaſon and Revelation, which are only different Ways of arriving at the Knowledge of them. Suppoſing therefore

fore that the Truths themſelves are different from each other, as well as the ſeveral Ways by which the Knowledge of them is attain'd; Doth it follow, that they muſt therefore be repugnant? To aſſert this, is to bid Defiance to common Senſe and Reaſon.

By Reaſon, here, I mean that which paſſes under the Name of right Reaſon, or the Faculty conſider'd as properly exercis'd about its proper Object. In ſuch a Caſe, the Things diſcover'd by Reaſon are, and muſt be true; And the Evidence of the ſeveral Truths ſo diſcover'd, makes it impoſſible to withhold Aſſent. So again, by Revelation, I mean, not merely a pretended Revelation, but a true one; ſome real Manifeſtation of the Supreme Being, by which he declares his Will and Pleaſure to the World. I am oblig'd to be thus cautious, in order to avoid Diſputes with reference Either to the Concluſions of an ill-conducted Reaſon, or a merely nominal and pretended Revelation; and to guard againſt ſuch Inconſiſtencies as may be found to ariſe from an improper Uſe of theſe Terms. This being noted, I muſt affirm, That as every Thing really demonſtrable by Reaſon, and knowable by it, muſt be true; ſo every Thing really declar'd by God, in the Way of Revelation, muſt be true likewiſe. On any other Foot, we muſt maintain one or both theſe Points, *viz.* That God may be deceiv'd himſelf, or may deceive

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and miſlead his Creatures. But to maintain Either of theſe, is inconſiſtent with the moſt certain Principles of Reaſon; with thoſe, from which the abſolute Wiſdom and Rectitude of the Divine Being are evidently concluded. If the Collections therefore of right Reaſon are certainly true; And if the Diſcoveries made by Divine Revelation muſt likewiſe carry with them certain Truth; And if there can be no real Inconſiſtency between the ſeveral Truths we diſcover, whatever the Ways may be in which we diſcover them, then my firſt Poſition is ſufficiently evinc'd, *viz.* That there is no Inconſiſtency between Reaſon and Revelation.

However, That an abſolute Submiſſion to both theſe is in its Nature poſſible, and upon many Accounts proper, is the main Point I am concern'd about. By an abſolute Submiſſion to theſe, muſt be underſtood, an Aſſent to every Propoſition taught by either, and an unreſerv'd Obedience to every Precept inculcated by either. I conceive the Poſſibility of this is evident at firſt Sight, if there be no Inconſiſtency between Reaſon and Revelation; If the Things, each Way diſcover'd, are either coincident, (as in ſome Caſes they are); or elſe ſuch as mutually conſiſt with, and even ſupport each other. But if this be poſſible, I am certain it muſt, on ſeveral Accounts, be reaſonable.

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As to our Submiſſion to the Rules of Reaſon, I can have no Diſpute with this Gentleman. We both of us allow, and even contend, That Reaſon will be heard. The only Queſtion to be debated, is This; Whether Revelation hath a like Claim to our Submiſſion? This is by me affirm'd, and by This Gentleman deny'd; upon what Grounds we ſhall ſee immediately.

Yet before I proceed to examine the Objections alledg'd by this Author, give me Leave to ask a few Queſtions. Doth not Reaſon it ſelf tell us, That there is a God? —— That this God is Wiſe, Juſt, and Righteous? —— That if He be ſo, every Thing which He declares, muſt be true? And, if it muſt be true, Doth not this Reaſon teach us again, That our Aſſent is due to it? If the Revelation be immediate, *i. e.* if it be made by an immediate Act of the Supreme Being on the Mind of a Prophet, no Difficulties can poſſibly ariſe to ſuch a Perſon about the Reality of the Revelation; Becauſe God cannot want the Means of making his Will as certainly known by immediate Impreſſion, as by the cleareſt Demonſtrations of Reaſon. But, where the Revelation is mediate or traditional, the Caſe may be ſomewhat different. However, even here, the Grounds or Motives for receiving the Revelation, are rational Grounds or Motives; to be try'd by Reaſon, and approvable by it.

If therefore we receive the Revelation itſelf upon rational Motives of Credibility; And, if Reaſon itſelf teaches us, that what is thus receiv'd as a Divine Revelation, ought to be credited, and ſubmitted to; then I muſt conclude, that theſe Two are far from being unfriendly to each other; and that Reaſon itſelf, duly exercis'd, whilſt it conducts us to Revelation, ſupports us in obeying it. We are convinc'd what is a mediate or traditional Revelation, by the right Uſe of our rational Faculties: We are convinc'd likewiſe by the ſame Reaſon, that ſuch a Revelation ought to be obey'd entirely; It follows, that an Obedience to both theſe, is ſo far from being inconſiſtent, that we cannot really obey Reaſon, without paying an abſolute Regard to Revelation.

What our Author objects on this Head, amounts to This; 1. "That to be govern'd "by Revelation, is to take every Thing "upon Truſt; and, To be govern'd by "Reaſon, is Not to admit any Thing farther "than we ſee it reaſonable. To ſuppoſe "both theſe to be conſiſtent, is to ſuppoſe "it conſiſtent to take, and not to take Things "upon Truſt."

And, if it be alledg'd, (as he knows we ſhall alledge), That we are to try, by our Reaſon, What is, or is not a real Revelation, Then he objects, 2. "That this is "an odd Jumble, To prove the Truth of

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" a Book by the Truth of the Doctrines it " contains; and at the ſame time to con- " clude thoſe Doctrines to be true, becauſe " contain'd in that Book."

In reference to the former, I muſt allow, That to be govern'd by Revelation, is to take every Thing upon Truſt, concerning which we are ſatisfy'd that 'tis reveal'd; or, merely becauſe it is ſaid, Not by thoſe [fallible Men] for whoſe Dictates we have an implicit Faith, —— but, by that infallible and all-righteous Being, on whom we may depend ſecurely. To take Things upon Truſt, in this Caſe, is not only conſiſtent with Reaſon, but likewiſe a neceſſary Concluſion of Reaſon itſelf. On the other Hand, To be govern'd by Reaſon, is not to admit any Thing further than we ſee it reaſonable: This likewiſe I muſt allow: But then, let me obſerve to this Gentleman, That there are Two Ways in which we may ſee a Thing to be reaſonable; 1. From the internal Evidence of the Thing itſelf: And here, He who yields to any pretended Authority againſt ſuch internal Evidence, acts unreaſonably, no doubt. But it may happen, that the Meaſure of our Capacities, or the Want of Opportunities, may be ſuch, as ſhall diſqualify us for diſcovering the Truth from the internal Evidence of the Thing. What, I pray, muſt be done in ſuch a Caſe as this? Are we to give Credit to no one?

Are we to admit Nothing; and to act Nothing? This, ſurely, will not be maintain'd by any one, who conſiders the Conſequences which muſt ariſe from it. In this Caſe, Reaſon will teach us to pay ſuch a Deference even to human Authority, as the Skill and Integrity of the Perſon whom we credit will juſtify. To do this, muſt be reaſonable and fitting, becauſe it is doing the beſt we can; tho' in the particular Preſcriptions of this Authority we may not diſcern the real Fitneſs of the Thing preſcrib'd. But, where the Authority which preſcribes to us, is abſolutely infallible, and where we own and acknowledge it to be ſo, there I will not affirm merely that it may be reaſonable to ſubmit, but that it is neceſſary to do ſo: There Reaſon will require us to take the Thing upon Truſt; There we ſhall ſee that our Aſſent is reaſonable in the higheſt Degree: And conſequently, by believing, in ſuch a Caſe, we do not admit any Thing farther than we ſee it reaſonable to do ſo.

Upon the Whole; To the Inconſiſtency which our Author alledges between taking Things upon Truſt, and not taking them upon Truſt, I muſt reply; That Reaſon doth by no means require us, Not to take a Thing upon Truſt, where the Authority we depend on is infallible; and eſpecially, where we have not Reach enough to determine for ourſelves on the internal Evidence

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of the Thing. Now, if Reaſon doth not require this, but the contrary, then our Author's Objection fails, as being built on a Principle in itſelf groundleſs and falſe.

But he adds, "To receive a Religion on "Account of Authority, ſuppoſes, that if "the ſame Authority promulgated a dif-"ferent Religion, we ſhould be oblig'd to "receive it." What then? What Difficulties, I pray, can ariſe, where we are aſſur'd, that the Authority is ſupreme and infallible? None certainly, but what might equally ariſe, (if any can ariſe,) from Reaſon itſelf. To receive a Religion on the Score of Reaſon, ſuppoſes, that if the ſame Reaſon taught a different Religion, we ſhould be oblig'd to receive it. This may be very True, (if the Suppoſition can be made,) and yet of no Conſequence in the Point we are debating. All that I ſhall obſerve farther, is This; that right Reaſon can teach us Nothing which is inconſiſtent with Truth or Fitneſs: Neither can God do ſo, who is eſſentially and abſolutely reaſonable. And if any Suppoſitions of the Nature abovemention'd, would be thought extravagant in the one Caſe, they muſt equally be ſo in the other.

I have obſerv'd above, that we are to pay an abſolute Obedience to Revelation. But then the Uſe of Reaſon is not entirely excluded: For, we muſt try, by this very

Reaſon, what is, or is not a Revelation; we muſt examine what is offer'd as reveal'd, whether it be capable of being reveal'd, or not, *i. e.* whether it be conſiſtent with the ſure and known Principles of Reaſon. And if every Thing be clear on this Head, then we muſt try, whether there be ſufficient external Evidence to prove the Revelation. If there be, (and Reaſon is to determine on theſe Points,) then Reaſon itſelf leads us to Revelation.

But our Author obſerves, "It is an odd "Jumble, to prove the Truth of a Book by "the Truth of the Doctrines it contains; "and at the ſame Time to conclude theſe "Doctrines to be true, becauſe contain'd in "that Book." But, by this Gentleman's Leave, the Matter is by no means ſtated fairly. We do not prove the Truth of the Book by the Truth of the Doctrines: We do not affirm, that Reaſon leads us to acknowledge a Revelation, by antecedently proving the Truth of the Things reveal'd. This would be a Jumble indeed. But, what we affirm, is This; That Reaſon tries the Doctrines or Precepts as far as it can; and ſees, whether any Objections can be made againſt them, from conſidering the Principles of natural Light. If not, then, for any Thing which appears to the contrary, theſe Doctrines may be true, and the Precepts deliver'd may be agreeable with the Will of God.

God. Whether they are ſo, or not, is another Queſtion, and to be determin'd in another Way. Here Reaſon comes in again; and tries the Matters of Fact which are alledg'd as external Evidence, in the ſame way as other Matters of Fact are try'd. If every Thing ſhall appear right here, then the Things propos'd muſt be receiv'd as reveal'd; And when this Point is gain'd, we then infer, that the Particulars contain'd in the Revelation muſt be true. In this Way of repreſenting the Matter, all is clear. Here are none of our Author's imaginary Jumbles. Reaſon leads us to acknowledge the Revelation: —— How? Not by proving, antecedently to a Revelation, the particular Truths reveal'd; but by proving the Revelation itſelf. And the Revelation is prov'd, —— How? By ſhewing, from the Nature of the Thing, that Reaſon hath no Objection againſt the Poſſibility of Matters declar'd by it; and afterwards, That the Facts alledg'd are ſufficient to confirm it. The Conſequence from this muſt be, That the Things ſo reveal'd are certain; That, in this Proceſs, every Thing is aſcrib'd to Reaſon, which doth, or poſſibly can belong to Reaſon; —— That we are govern'd abſolutely by Reaſon, as far as Reaſon carries us; and when it hath led us on to Revelation, we are then to be govern'd abſolutely by Revelation.

Thus I have conſider'd what our Author hath alledg'd againſt The Expediency of a Revelation, in order to the more perfect, more eaſy, and more general Knowledge of the Rule of Life. I have endeavour'd to ſhew, that there is no Inconſiſtency in the Regards we pay to Reaſon, and to Revelation; and that notwithſtanding we affirm, we are to be abſolutely govern'd by both, yet there is no ſuch Jumble or Confuſion in the Caſe, as this Gentleman imagines.

This, I ſay, I have endeavour'd to ſhew; Not that theſe Objections, as ſtated by him, are ſo very formidable, or contain any Thing ſpecious; but becauſe they are the only Arguments he alledges in direct Proof of his Point; and, becauſe he inſiſts on them with ſuch an Air of Confidence, and carries on this Way of Reaſoning for ſeveral Pages together. Had it not been for this, I ſhould not have troubled myſelf with offering any Remarks on ſuch Kinds of Arguing; which, however weak they are, and will appear to be to conſidering Men, may yet deceive unwary Readers, who take Confidence for Strength, and may be apt to credit a Man for affirming roundly, and repeating frequently. —— But enough of this. The farther Expediency of a Revelation will appear from what ſhall be offer'd in the following Chapter.

CHAP.

CHAP. VIII.

Whether a Revelation be not expedient, in order to enforce the general Practice of the Rule of Life.

HITHERTO I have endeavour'd to ſhew the Expediency of a Revelation, in order to fix and determine, for general Uſe, a proper Rule of Life: Which, tho' it ſhould be thought diſcoverable by ſome, in the Uſe of Reaſon, who enjoy the Advantages of ſtrong natural Parts, a liberal Education, and ſufficient Leiſure, muſt yet, in a great meaſure, be out of the Reach of others, of lower Station and Condition.

At preſent I ſhall ſuppoſe this proper Rule known, and aſſented to; and Enquire, What muſt be the Conſequence on this Supposition? In this Caſe, I think, it muſt be allow'd, that as every rational Being muſt take a Pleaſure in acting agreeably to the Rules of Reaſon, as far as theſe Rules ap-

pear to him; ſo, were there no Hindrance in the Way, Men would doubtleſs act the right Part uniformly. For, tho' a Liberty there muſt be in Man, as there is in every intelligent Being; yet ſtill Men are in Fact determin'd to that Side which appears the beſt, ſo long as it appears to be ſo: It follows, that as long as they carefully attend to Reaſon, and feel a Satisfaction in acting agreeably, (which Satisfaction cannot, and they are conſcious cannot, be obtain'd in any other Way), ſo long, we may aſſure ourſelves, they will behave as reaſonable Beings are concern'd to do. Upon this I preſume that the Angels in Heaven, tho' not abſolutely impeccable, will not in the Event conduct themſelves amiſs; as having a quick Senſe of what is fit and proper to be done, and no Temptations to deviate from this Rule: And upon the ſame Ground may we preſume likewiſe, that Good Men, in the other World, will preſerve their Innocence inviolate.

But thoſe who reckon upon ſuch a right State of human Nature in the preſent Conſtitution of Things, ſeem to have conſider'd Matters ſlightly. For, over and above the Imperfection of our intellectual Capacities, (of which enough hath been ſaid heretofore), we have a Variety of ſtrong Paſſions to combat. Some Tendencies are conſtitutional; Others ariſe from Education, Cuſtom,

Cuſtom, or perhaps the very Kind of Life we are oblig'd to live in. To which may be added, outward Temptations of almoſt every Kind; Example, Solicitation, Intereſt, Pleaſure, Power. Men receive ſuch a ſtrong Biaſs from ſome or other of theſe, as requires very powerful Motives on the other Side; and without which, it cannot be hop'd they ſhould be kept right, or be prevented from acting that Part, which in their cooler Hours they muſt condemn.

In ſuch a State as this, Men cannot be prevail'd on to purſue an uniform Courſe of Virtue, but upon one or other of theſe Suppoſitions.

1. That the mere Pleaſure of acting Well, is a Balance for all the Inconveniencies of doing otherwiſe, of whatever Kind they be; and that amidſt all the Embaraſments of Paſſions and Temptations, the Conſideration of this virtuous Pleaſure hath ſufficient Room to act upon the Mind, and to influence the Choice. Or,

2. If this ſhould not prove the Caſe, that there are ſome external Motives, ariſing from the Effects and Conſequences of our Actions, ſufficient to produce what the mere Fitneſs and Reaſonableneſs of the Thing cannot do.

Firſt then, It may perhaps be affirm'd, That the mere Pleaſure of doing Well, is a Balance for all the Inconveniencies of acting other-

otherwiſe, of whatever Kind they be. Upon which I muſt obſerve, That this Affirmation ſuppoſes, not only that Men, as rational Creatures, take a Satisfaction in Truth, and the Conſciouſneſs of acting agreeably to Truth; but likewiſe, that there is ſuch a moral Taſte implanted in us, as ſhall carry us farther than a mere Affection and Regard for Truth can do. This, I conceive, is evident from hence; That if Men were influenc'd no farther than mere Truth, as ſuch, could carry them, they would be equally influenc'd by all Truths; and conſequently, by Metaphyſical or Natural Truth, as much as by Moral. Now, do we find in Fact, that Metaphyſical or Natural Truth, when it is combated by any of the afore-mention'd Difficulties, is ſufficient to gain our Approbation, or to determine our Choice? Would a Man die, to confirm the Truth of a Philoſophical Problem? Or, if this ſhould be thought too extravagant a Queſtion, Let me demand, Whether the Affection for mere Truth be ſuch, as will prevail with Men, in the general, to forego any extraordinary Pleaſure, or to incur any extraordinary Pain? to throw up any Advantages in View, or to incur any conſiderable Loſs or Calamity? I do not affirm but Inſtances may ſometimes be produc'd of Men, who, for the ſake of ſome favourite Truths, have ventur'd all this; and ſuch Inſtances there poſſibly may be

again.

again. But then it is worth remarking, that if this were done for the ſake of Truth, merely as ſuch, it would equally hold with regard to any Truth whatſoever. Yet, hath the World ever produc'd a Man, who thought himſelf concern'd to purſue every Kind of Truth at this Rate? If not, then 'tis evident, that there muſt be ſomething very particular in thoſe Truths, which a Man purſues ſo ardently; Something which recommends them to his Approbation and Eſteem in a ſingular manner; Or, ſome Suitableneſs in them to the particular Genius and Temper of the Man.

That which I call Genius, with reference to any other Kind of Truths, and by which a Man is not only qualify'd to penetrate far into Matters, and to diſtinguiſh nicely, but likewiſe to purſue Things of that Kind, in Oppoſition to every Sort of Diſcouragement, That, in the Point I am now upon, I ſhall term a Moral Senſe or Taſte. This implies ſuch a quick Perception of the Agreeableneſs and Beauty of what is fitting, as gains our Approbation, and determines us ſtrongly to purſue it. The Practice of Virtue, as ſuch, can be ſupported on no other Foot than this: For, if there be implanted in us a natural Deſire of what is good or pleaſing, and a natural Averſion from what is evil or diſpleaſing, we cannot poſſibly chuſe Virtue, as ſuch, in Oppoſition to theſe, but where there

there is ſomething in Virtue which makes it more deſirable than any other Good, ſomething in Vice which is worſe than may be found in any other Evil we are expos'd to. And this, I ſay, can be built on Nothing elſe but the Senſe or Taſte above mention'd.

Thus much indeed muſt here be granted, that there is ſomewhat of this Kind implanted in human Nature: There is a Power not only of diſtinguiſhing, in ſome meaſure, what is right or wrong in Actions, but likewiſe a Tendency or Inclination to act agreeably; to purſue the one, and to avoid the other. But then we ſhould obſerve withal, that this moral Senſe doth not prevail alike in all Perſons. Different Men have it in different Degrees. Perhaps the very Original Principle itſelf may be various in ſeveral Men, juſt as many other Faculties are found to be: Or, if it ſhould be affirm'd, That in the original Conſtitution of human Nature this Principle muſt be every-where the ſame; we find, That, as Things now ſubſiſt, it is not in Fact alike every-where: For, ſome Perſons abhor what others practiſe not only without Remorſe, but with Pleaſure.

But, to allow as much as can be ask'd in Favour of this Moral Senſe, and original Tendency to Virtue, Let us ſuppoſe it were every-where uniform; yet, before this Principle can have its Effect, we muſt ſuppoſe, that Men

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are inclin'd to regard and attend to an Admonition of this Kind. Without this, the general Principle will ſignify nothing. An habitual Knowledge of Truth is of no Moment without an actual Knowledge of it, *i. e.* unleſs Men attend to, and conſider it. Juſt in the ſame manner the having a general Tendency to conduct ourſelves aright muſt be uſeleſs, if there be any contrary Movements, which ſhall turn us aſide from conſidering the Truth of the Caſe, and, conſequently, diſappoint the Effect of that moral Inclination, which would otherwiſe ariſe from the right View of Things.

Now, I think it obvious, that inward Affections and Paſſions, awaken'd in us by outward Temptations, and thoſe eſpecially which have ſome very great apparent Good or Evil for their Objects, are apt to overpower the Mind. Let the Generality of Mankind be try'd, and let it be ſeen how they do, or will act on ſuch Occaſions. If, in ſome few, the Virtuous Principle hath gain'd ſuch Poſſeſſion, and prevail'd ſo far, as to be ever preſent, much may be expected, no doubt: But, if it ſhall happen, either thro' wrong Education, or any other Cauſe, that Mens Thoughts are diſſipated, and their Paſſions become ſtrong, they will be hurried away immediately, and be found to act in juſt the ſame irregular Manner, when Temptations urge them, as tho' they had never been

been poſſeſs'd of any ſuch Principle at all. At leaſt, this muſt prove the Caſe, as often as any great or ſudden Terror preſents itſelf to them; or, any very important and immediate Advantage in Life is to be gained. To ſay, that, in ſuch a Caſe, the mere Senſe of Virtue, and of what is really fit and proper in Life, will bear them out, and to affirm this, not only of ſome few Perſons, of an extraordinary moral Taſte, but likewiſe of the common and ordinary Sort, is to contradict the well-known Experience of the World, in all Ages of it.

If this be the Caſe, What can we farther ſuppoſe in Aid of Virtue? Some poſſibly may tell us, That the real Advantages ariſing from it, in the natural Effects which it produces, are ſufficient for this Purpoſe. But, are there, in Fact, ſuch Advantages which ſpring univerſally from the Practice of Virtue? It muſt indeed be own'd, that, upon the Whole, a virtuous Courſe is preferable to a vicious one, even tho' we ſhould look no farther than the preſent Life; or, if you pleaſe, that a Man of a general good Conduct, will, for the moſt Part, and in the ordinary Courſe of Things, enjoy more Happineſs than can be had in a contrary Way: And, If the Practice of Virtue were univerſal and uniform, I may be bold to affirm, that all that Happineſs would be really enjoy'd, which can be had in the preſent Conſtitution

of

of Things. But then, it ſhould be remember'd, that, whilſt Some are well diſpos'd, and deſirous of ordering their Actions right, Others are as ſtrongly inclin'd another Way. Theſe will take Advantage of the Honeſty and Simplicity of the truly virtuous Man; and, perhaps, bring Misfortunes on him by Means of the very Virtue he enjoys. It may happen, and ſometimes does ſo, that to be reſolute in the Cauſe of Virtue, ſhall deprive a Man of every Advantage he can hope for in Life, and, perhaps, even of Life itſelf; as, on the other hand, One baſe and villainous Action ſhall gain him ſingular Advantages, and ſet him above being accountable to any Man. Shall any one affirm therefore, that, upon this State of the Matter, the natural Advantages of Virtue are ſufficient to keep up the uniform Practice of it? This would be to affirm, that the Miſeries which it occaſions are in themſelves eligible.

Yet, we may give up this too, and ſupport our Point upon almoſt any Conceſſions which can be made. Be it therefore that Virtue is, in every Inſtance of it, really attended with natural Advantages; and that Men are ſo far from ſuffering, upon the whole, this Way, that they gain to themſelves ſuch natural Goods as cannot be ſecur'd in any other: Let this, I ſay, be ſuppos'd; Yet I may demand, Whether every Thing of this Kind be

be ſo clear and apparent, that all Men ſhall ſee it immediately. Is not the Evil, which is many Times incurr'd on the Account of Virtue, preſent and ſenſible, whilſt the good Conſequences of it are remote and out of Sight? Is not the Management of Providence ſuch as requires much Thought and Obſervation, to clear up Difficulties, and to ſhew, that, upon the Whole, it is really better to act virtuouſly, in every Inſtance, than otherwiſe? If this be true, then How, I would deſire to know, can the Generality of Mankind be influenced from hence? It will be vain to alledge, that, in every Inſtance of virtuous Conduct, a Man's own Intereſt is really conſulted, either in a direct Way, as it happens frequently; or elſe, by contributing to the publick Good, in which his own likewiſe is included: It will, I ſay, be vain to alledge this, (however true it may be in itſelf,) unleſs Men can be made ſenſible, that theſe Allegations are true, and ſuch Impreſſions can be made on them as ſhall bring theſe Thoughts to their Mind whenever fit Occaſions offer.

After all, if the former Methods of recommending and enforcing the Practice of Virtue ſhould fail, there ſtill remains another, which, it may be thought, will ſupply their Defects; *viz.* The Annexing ſome Advantages or Diſadvantages to Mens Actions, over and above the natural Conſequences of them: Theſe, if they are of any high Importance, and

and ſo clearly denounc'd, that every Man ſhall, in Fact, know them, or may know them, if he pleaſes, will be ſtrong Enforcements, and ſufficient to obtain their End.

This may, indeed, be ſaid: But will not this Scheme be attended with as many Difficulties as the former? Let me demand, Who ſhall fix the Rewards or Penalties propos'd? How ſhall Men be aſſur'd, that ſuch Sanctions are really fix'd, and will, in Fact, be executed? If we are referr'd to the Civil Power, for Support of this Scheme, then, beſides what hath been advanc'd heretofore, p. 93. I may obſerve, That, to do this effectually, we muſt carry Matters farther than either the Ends of Civil Government will juſtify, or the Condition of human Nature allow of.

The End of Civil Government is, I conceive, Protection, whether from foreign Injuries, or domeſtick. To this Purpoſe it is neceſſary, 1. That the whole Force of the Community be united, ſome Way or other, in order to repel Invaders; and, 2. That ſuch Acts be reſtrained amongſt the Members of this Community, whereby the Peace and Proſperity of it are impeach'd.

If this be the Caſe, then Civil Government is concern'd, 1. Rather to puniſh Crimes, than to reward Virtues; And, 2. In puniſhing Crimes, it can regard thoſe only which have ſome direct Influence towards deſtroying the Peace or Proſperity of that

Society. Thus, it may reſtrain, in ſome meaſure, the groſſer Acts of Injury and Injuſtice; and, for this End, Penalties are inflicted. But doth it, in like manner, reward the Juſt, or aſſign any ſpecial Advantages to be enjoy'd by thoſe who conform themſelves to Law? This, I believe, is ſeldom ſeen, and not at all agreeable to the Uſages of thoſe States which are thought the beſt regulated.

Nor can this, in the Nature of Things, be done ſufficiently: For, let us ſuppoſe, that a Man's outward Actions are regular; Upon this Suppoſition, he hath perform'd all that Civil Laws require; His inward Thoughts are not cognizable in an human Court; Theſe are incapable of being known; or, if they were known, yet cannot be puniſh'd. In this Senſe, mere Thought is free, that, as no Man can preſcribe to it in the Way of Authority, ſo neither can He reward or puniſh it.

Beyond this, there are many outward Acts of Virtue, which muſt be exempt from human Preſcription. Thus, Gratitude, Charity, and the like, muſt be free as Thought itſelf. To require theſe in the ſame manner as other Acts are requir'd, would alter the very Nature of the Things: They would then become properly Debts; and Men would be concern'd to diſcharge them, not as Inſtances of Humanity or Thankfulneſs, but purely as the Preſcriptions of that Law they durſt not diſobey. For ſome ſuch Reaſon as this St. *Paul* declares,

declares, (what is true, whether he intended it of the Civil Law or not) that *the Law is not made for a righteous Man, but for the lawleſs and diſobedient.* 1 Tim. 1. 9. It is intended, not as a compleat Meaſure of what is fit and right, and agreeable to the Will of God, (which cannot be fully pointed out this Way, or ſufficiently enforc'd in it) but only to guard againſt thoſe Exorbitances, which are deſtructive of all human Society.

We may conclude, from what hath been ſaid, that the ſame Being who fram'd the World, and conſtituted Things in ſuch a Manner, that certain Rules of Fitneſs reſult from them, muſt enforce Obedience to theſe Rules. On any other Foot theſe will rather appear to us as Counſels and Advices, than Matters of ſtrict and proper Duty. It hath been ſhewn above, that, whilſt Human Nature ſubſiſts as it doth at preſent, Virtue can neither enforce itſelf, nor can it be ſufficiently bound on us in a human Way: Something therefore muſt be found out, to ballance the Affections and Paſſions of Men; and this cannot be done, but by Sanctions eſtabliſh'd by God himſelf.

Yet our Author thinks this is needleſs, and, which is more, impoſſible. Rewards or Puniſhments to be received hereafter, unleſs they be the natural Conſequences of Mens Actions, he explodes: And, tho' he ſpeaks ſometimes of future Happineſs; and inti-

mates ſomewhat (when he thinks it will ſerve his Turn) of Rewards and Puniſhments; yet, as I do not remember he hath any where expreſſly aſſerted them in the general Senſe which they carry, ſo in one Place he hath uſed his Endeavours to overthrow them. His Words are theſe; "Tho' human Law-"givers are forc'd to have Recourſe to "Puniſhments, which are not connected with "the Things they forbid, yet a Being of "infinite Power is not thus ſtreighten'd, but "may make one the neceſſary Conſequence "of the other. And, indeed, how can it "be otherwiſe, ſince Good and Evil have "their Foundation in the Eſſential Dif-"ference of Things, and their Nature is "fix'd and immoveable, and, conſequently, "our Happineſs depends on the intrinſick "Nature of the one, and our Miſery on "the intrinſick Nature of the other." p. 26.

It is from hence certain, and will be farther confirm'd by our Author's Way of Reaſoning in the former Page, that he admits none other Rewards or Puniſhments than thoſe which are the neceſſary and inſeparable Conſequences of Mens Actions. In the Words now cited he affirms, 1. That God may reward or puniſh in this Way. And, 2. That he muſt do ſo.

As to the former, I would beg to know what Adverſary he is contending with: What Perſon ever aſſerted, that God cannot

make

make Happineſs or Miſery the neceſſary Conſequences of Mens Actions? Doth not every Man, capable of underſtanding this Subject, maintain, not only that God may do this, but that in many Inſtances He actually hath done it? Nay, do we not maintain farther, in as ſtrong Terms as himſelf, that, when Men come to reflect coolly, they muſt receive Comfort from the Conſciouſneſs of having acted well, and be griev'd under the Senſe of having acted ill? But, what of all this! Doth it follow that this is of itſelf ſufficient, in the preſent State of Things, to enforce the uniform Practice of Virtue? Is every Man ſenſible of theſe Conſequences? Or, doth every Man ſo nicely examine his own Actions, as to produce that Comfort or Remorſe which might ariſe from a proper View of them? If not, then ſomething farther is expedient for the purpoſe.

He aſſerts, in the next Place, That God muſt reward or puniſh Men in this Manner. "How (ſays he) can it be otherwiſe, ſince "Good and Evil have their Foundation in "the eſſential Difference of Things." Tho' it be plain enough what our Author intends to prove in this Place, yet 'tis not ſo clear Where the Force of his Argument lies. There are Two Kinds of Good or Evil, *viz.* Natural and Moral; and his Buſineſs is to ſhew, that natural Good or Evil is neceſſarily connected with moral Good or Evil. How

this is prov'd by the Argument here produc'd I cannot ſee, and our Author is concern'd to ſhew it. However, were there any Thing in the Argument, it ſtill remains to be ſhewn, that this natural Good or Evil, which may be the diſtant Conſequence of Mens Actions muſt neceſſarily be greater than the preſent Advantage, or Diſadvantage, which may poſſibly ariſe from them. Unleſs this be ſhewn, Virtue may need ſome ſtronger Enforcements than any which ariſe from the preſent Conſideration; and conſequently, we ſhall be led to enquire ſomewhat farther into this Point.

It hath been obſerv'd by me heretofore, p. 94. that Wiſe and Good Men have argued in the following Manner; As God muſt have an unalterable Love of Righteouſneſs, ſo he cannot be ſuppos'd to leave its Intereſts unſupported. And therefore, if this cannot be, or in Fact is not ſufficiently done in the preſent Management of Things, Amends will be made hereafter. This Concluſion they farther ſupported by ſeveral other uſeful Conſiderations. Notwithſtanding this, I have noted, that they did not all of them agree upon the Point; that thoſe who affirm'd it with Confidence, on ſome Occaſions, intimated their Diſtruſt of it on others; and that the very Arguments by which they endeavour'd to evince the Matter (whatever Force they might really have) were too ſubtle and

abſtracted,

abſtracted, and not ſuited to the Apprehenſions of the Vulgar. To which was added, that, notwithſtanding the Generality of Mankind had a certain Perſuaſion of a future State, yet, as their Notions were indiſtinct, and not built on a ſolid Foundation, ſo they muſt prove inſufficient to bear them out in the conſtant Practice of Virtue. This Perſwaſion could not enable them to combat thoſe Temptations which were extraordinary and preſſing.

How then ſhall the Cauſe of Virtue be maintain'd, and the proper Rule of Life enforc'd? But, can this be any longer a Queſtion with us? Cannot God declare his Intention in this reſpect? If the Author of our Being may make us happy or miſerable, is it impoſſible for him to manifeſt to us in an extraordinary Way what he deſigns to do? If a Revelation be poſſible, as I have ſhewn heretofore, then this *may* be done; and, if it be of any Conſequence to us to have a more certain and diſtinct View of theſe Things than our own Reaſon can give us, or the Opportunities we enjoy will admit of, then no one can affirm that it is unfit or improper to be done: And when we conſider farther, that the doing this is entirely ſuitable to the Righteouſneſs, Goodneſs, and Wiſdom of God, then we may conclude that the Thing is expedient, and what might be hop'd for

when it ſhould be conſiſtent with the ſeveral other Schemes of Providence.

I muſt not quit this Head, Of the Expediency of a Revelation, without conſidering Two Objections alledg'd by this Gentleman.

1. If a Revelation be expedient to be made to Any, it muſt be equally expedient to be made to All: And conſequently, as it ought to have commenc'd with the firſt Beginning of Human Kind, ſo it ought to have been communicated to all the World; whereas it is not pretended, on our Part, that the Chriſtian Revelation was made 'till Four Thouſand Years were paſs'd, nor that it is to this very Day univerſally promulgated.

2. It is affirm'd, That this Revelation hath not in Fact anſwer'd thoſe Purpoſes for which we affirm it to have been expedient; and that Men are ſo far from being the better for it, that it hath actually prov'd the Cauſe of greater Wickedneſs, Cruelty, and Perſecution, than were ever known before. Some Notice muſt be taken of theſe Two Objections, before I proceed to evince and ſupport the Reality of a Revelation.

The *firſt* Objection is repreſented by our Author in the following Words; "If the "Deſign of God, in communicating any "Thing of Himſelf to Men, was their Happineſs; would not that Deſign have "oblig'd him, who at all Times alike deſires "their Happineſs, to have at all Times alike "com-

" communicated it to them? If God always " acts for the Good of his Creatures, What " Reaſon can be aſſign'd why he ſhould not " from the Beginning have diſcover'd ſuch " Things as make for their Good, but de- " ferr'd the doing it 'till the Time of *Tibe-* " *rius*; ſince the ſooner this was done, the " greater would his Goodneſs appear to be? " Nay, is it conſiſtent with infinite Benevo- " lence to hide that for many Ages, which " he knew was as uſeful at firſt to prevent, " as afterwards it could be to put a Stop to " any Thing he diſlik'd? "

" And indeed, without denying that God " at all Times intended Mankind that Hap- " pineſs their Nature is capable of, we muſt " allow that at all Times he has given them " the Means of obtaining it by the Rules " he has preſcrib'd them for their Conduct; " and conſequently, theſe Rules muſt have " been diſcoverable at all Times. For, if " God acts upon rational Motives, muſt not " the ſame Motives which oblig'd him to " diſcover any Thing that is for the Good " of Mankind, have oblig'd him to diſcover " every Thing that is ſo? and that too, " after the ſame plain manner; and not do " this, as it were, grudgingly, Little by " Little; here a Bit, and there a Bit; and " that too to one favourite Nation only, " under the Vail of Types and Allegories; " and at laſt, tho' he diſcover'd ſome Things

" more

" more plainly, yet it was but to a ſmall " Part of Mankind, the Bulk of them to " this Day remaining in deplorable Igno- " rance." p. 393, 394.

There are Three Things here aſſerted by our Author.

1. If a Revelation be thought ſo expedient to be made, as we on our Part contend, it ought to have been made to us in the Beginning, and not deferr'd 'till the Time of *Tiberius*; ſince the ſooner this was done, the greater would God's Goodneſs appear to be.

2. That this Revelation, ſo made to us in the Beginning, ought to extend itſelf to every Thing which is for the Good of Mankind; and not be granted (as he expreſſes himſelf) grudgingly, Little by Little.

3. That it ought to be granted, as at all Times, and in the fulleſt Manner, ſo likewiſe every-where, and to every Perſon alike: Not to one favourite Nation only, or to a ſmall Part of Mankind, the Bulk of them to this Day remaining in deplorable Ignorance.

Theſe Three Aſſertions are directly contain'd in the Objection produc'd: In which, if there be any Thing of Truth or Weight, it will bear full as hard upon Natural Religion as Reveal'd. For, according to this Way of Arguing, If God intended the Happineſs of Man, by communicating himſelf

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to him in the Uſe of Reaſon, Would not that Deſign have oblig'd Him, who at all Times alike deſires his Happineſs, to have communicated himſelf always alike this Way? and conſequently, To have given him the full Uſe of his Reaſon the firſt Moment of his Being; and not have deferr'd this for ſeveral Years of Infancy and Childhood? Would He not have diſcover'd every Thing that was fit and proper, and capable of being known by him in Time, at once; ſo as that he ſhould not come to the Knowledge of it gradually and by ſlow Steps, gaining it by Little and Little; here a Bit, and there a Bit? Would he, after all, make ſo great a Difference between Men; making Some, a ſmall Part of Mankind, his Favourites, by vouchſafing them a greater Meaſure of Natural Parts, and greater Opportunities of Learning and Improvement? If Arguings of this Kind are thought to conclude againſt the Uſefulneſs and Expediency of Revelation, they muſt conclude, with as great Force, againſt the Uſefulneſs of thoſe Truths which are diſcover'd by Reaſon; and conſequently, they muſt prove that Men are not one whit better than Brutes themſelves. Or, if this muſt not be aſſerted, then the leaſt that our Author can conclude, is, That the Supreme Being deals unequally and hardly by his Creatures; whilſt he ſuppoſes that the Goodneſs of God obliges him

him to communicate all Advantages, in their own Nature capable of being communicated; and this in all Degrees, and at all Times equally: For, the ſooner this is done, (and for the ſame Reaſon I may ſay, the more extenſively it is done) the greater will God's Goodneſs appear to be. Fact contradicts ſuch fond and extravagant Reaſonings as theſe; and he cannot poſſibly ſupport them but by carrying Matters ſtill farther, and charging God with Iniquity.

I muſt beg Leave to add ſome farther Reflexions on this Point; by which I ſhall endeavour to ſhew, that his own Natural Religion is as much affected by this Method of Reaſoning, as Revelation itſelf can be. The Principle on which he proceeds, is This; Since God always deſires, and acts for the Good of his Creatures, he muſt always diſcover thoſe Things which make for their Good. Theſe are his own Words, and muſt be reſolv'd into this farther Principle, *viz.* That he muſt be oblig'd to beſtow all that Good he is capable of beſtowing: From whence theſe Conſequences will follow;

1. That He ought to beſtow on every Man all that Happineſs, whether preſent or future, whether Animal, or Intellectual, of which his Nature is in itſelf capable, and which the Faculties He hath beſtow'd upon him make him capable of enjoying.

2. That

2. That he ought to have beſtow'd upon him ſuch a Nature, and ſuch Faculties, as would qualify him for all that Happineſs which is in itſelf capable of being beſtow'd on any Being whatſoever.

3. That he ought not to have made any Difference or Diſtinction between the ſeveral Beings he created; but to have given them the ſame Nature, the ſame Perfections, and by this Means to have qualify'd them for the very ſame Degrees of Happineſs. To which we may add,

4. That foraſmuch as the ſooner all this is done, the greater God's Goodneſs muſt appear, He ought therefore to have produc'd all his Creatures from all Eternity: Or, if this might not be, all new Production ſuppoſing ſome antecedent Duration, then He ought not to have produc'd any Creatures at all. Theſe Conſequences follow manifeſtly from our Author's Principles; And therefore, if theſe are extravagant, the Principles, from which they follow, muſt be falſe.

From theſe Remarks on the Objection in general, I ſhall paſs on to the diſtinct Conſideration of its ſeveral Branches.

The *1ſt* was this; If a Revelation be thought ſo expedient to be made, as we on our Part contend, then it ought to have been made to us in the Beginning, and not deferr'd 'till the Time of *Tiberius*. But, do we

we really aſſert, as this Gentleman ſeems to intimate we do, that there was no Revelation made 'till the Time of *Tiberius*? He knows the contrary: And a little after, in the Paſſage above cited, he alludes as well to the Jewiſh Revelation as the Chriſtian.

Well: But the Objection, he will tell us, ſtill holds good; becauſe many Ages were paſs'd before the Delivery of *Moſes*'s Law. Very true: But then, Can he prove, that no Revelation was ever made 'till *Moſes*'s Time? Or, Is he perſuaded that we Chriſtians think there was none? How came he then to talk of God's diſcovering Things as it were grudgingly, by Little and Little? This, I ſuppoſe, muſt allude to the ſeveral Manifeſtations which we affirm God made of himſelf *at ſundry Times, and in divers Manners.*

After all, He will tell us, however this Matter ſhall ſtand, the Objection is in full Force. The Revelation which we affirm to have been expedient, is a Revelation of a proper Rule of Life? And Nothing of this Kind was ever offer'd 'till the Times of *Moſes*. Yet, how will he prove this, if he ſhould be call'd on to prove it? How will he prove that the whole Scheme of what he calls Natural Religion, was not originally diſcover'd to our firſt Parent by immediate Revelation? By him it might be taught his immediate Succeſſors; from whence

whence it may have deſcended down in many Succeſſions from one to another, 'till at laſt it might be forgot from what Original it ſprung: and then being alter'd, as the Iniquities or Follies of Mankind increas'd, thoſe ſeveral monſtrous Schemes might ariſe which were taught in the ſeveral Parts of the World. Our Author, I ſay, cannot prove that this was not the Caſe. But if it were ſo, then what he alledges from the bare Novelty of a Revelation is vain and groundleſs.

However, not to inſiſt on this, I do affirm, That upon Suppoſition a Revelation had not been vouchſaf'd ſo early, the State and Condition of the World might be ſuch, as not to need it in that Degree, in which they afterwards came to need it. It is certain, that in every Age of the World all Men have not needed this Favour equally. Thoſe who have enjoy'd an happy Conſtitution, had quick Parts, been rightly educated, and gain'd ſufficient Opportunities for carrying on their Enquiries, have certainly had leſs Occaſion for ſupernatural Inſtruction, than others who have labour'd under the contrary Diſadvantages. Thus likewiſe, in the more ſimple Ages of the World, before Men had degenerated to ſo prodigious a Degree, whilſt Men were as yet few, and the Temptations to act amiſs, ſmall; good Inſtruction might be eaſily propagated, and the

the World kept in ſome Order. But as human Race increas'd, ſo the Intereſt of Vice got Ground. Each ill Man endeavour'd to ſeduce his Neighbour; Temptations offer'd themſelves on every Hand; Many Vices were become faſhionable; and, in ſome Inſtances, ſupported on Principle, and practis'd even as Duties. Who doth not diſcern, that ſuch a Condition as this, was more unfriendly to the Cauſe of Virtue, than the Simplicity of the firſt Ages? That ſome extraordinary Methods were now more needful than they had been before? and conſequently, a Reaſon may be aſſign'd, in this Way of Thinking, why a Revelation ſhould be vouchſafed Men in one Age, which had been withheld formerly.

Yet, our Author thinks this will not ſerve our Purpoſe; For he demands, "How it is "conſiſtent with infinite Benevolence, to "hide that for many Ages, which God knew "was as uſeful at firſt to prevent, as afterwards it could be to put a Stop to any "Thing he diſlik'd." Theſe are the very Words of our Author: Upon which I might obſerve, That there is either great Impropriety in his Expreſſions; or, if he is willing to be underſtood in the more favourable Senſe of them, there is ſomething inſinuated, which is abſolutely falſe and groundleſs. "How (ſays he) is it conſiſtent with infinite "Benevolence, to hide, for many Ages, "what

" what God knew was uſeful ?" &c. The Thing affirm'd to be uſeful, &c. and concerning which he is here ſpeaking, is, a Divine Revelation; or, what he terms, a few Lines before, " God's communicating " any Thing of himſelf to Men." But to " hide a Revelation," is Something ſo very much out of the Way, that I cannot underſtand it. However, Let us interpret the Gentleman in a more favourable manner; Let us ſuppoſe he means by it, The " Hiding from " Men, for many Ages, the Knowledge and " Senſe of Duty." If this be what he means, then I muſt obſerve, That this is a very unfair Repreſentation of the Caſe. Do we aſſert, that the Want of that Knowledge which is neceſſary, in order to the right Apprehenſion of Moral and Religious Matters, is owing to God's hiding it from us? Don't we affirm, That originally Man had a full View of all he was concern'd to know? That afterward, having acted diſagreeably to this Knowledge, he corrupted his Nature, impair'd his Reaſon, and heighten'd his Paſſions? Don't we ſuppoſe farther, That during the more ſimple Ages, Man might in general know ſo much as was ſufficient to keep him within ſome tolerable Bounds? But that afterwards, when human Race increas'd, and Men, abuſing their Liberty, had corrupted themſelves farther, Vice might get Ground ſo far, as not to be ſtopp'd but by

an extraordinary Manifeſtation? Upon this State of the Matter, are not the Corruptions of Men owing rather to their own Perverſeneſs, than to God's hiding from them the Knowledge of their Duty? Why then is God here charged with Cruelty?

The main Thing however deſign'd in the Objection, is This; If a Revelation be now expedient in order to put a Stop to the Corruptions of Mankind, it muſt have been as expedient in order to prevent them in the Beginning; and infinite Benevolence is concern'd as well to do the one as the other. In Anſwer to which, Let it be conſider'd, That Divine Revelation, (as the Point hath been ſtated by us), is a Remedy graciouſly intended for the Cure of thoſe Corruptions which had overſpread human Nature; and that Remedies are not properly to be adminiſter'd, 'till the Diſeaſe makes them neceſſary. In the next Place, Theſe Corruptions did not ariſe from the Want of Revelation, but from Something elſe. Originally Man is ſuppos'd to have known what was fit and proper for him to do, and to have been acquainted with the ſeveral Motives to enforce his Duty: Yet he fell; and, by his Fall, brought a Taint and Corruption on his Nature. Afterward it is ſuppos'd that Men had ſuch a View of Things, as might, had they been duely careful, have kept them within ſome Bounds.

Whence

Whence then came it to paſs that Men degenerated ſo exceedingly? Why, from hence; they are free, and enjoy a natural Freedom of acting Wrong as well as Right: By abuſing this, they made that neceſſary, which in the original Conſtitution was not ſo. This charges the Fault not on God, but Man; and conſequently, Man only can be accountable for the Conſequence.

If there be any thing in the Difficulty before ſuggeſted ſtill remaining, it will, I conceive, be remov'd by obſerving what I ſhall propoſe in the next Place, *viz.* When we affirm a Revelation to be *expedient*, the Term hath a Double Acceptation, and may be referr'd either to Perſons or Things. When referr'd to Perſons, it imports a Want of Something, which upon that Account we affirm to be expedient; But when referr'd to Things, it not only imports ſome Want, but likewiſe a Fitneſs and Propriety in beſtowing the Thing needed. The Uſe I would make of the Diſtinction is This; However the State of the World might make a Revelation needful for Mankind, and therefore expedient, as the Word is referr'd to Perſons; yet ſeveral Circumſtances may intervene, which ſhall render it unfit and improper to be made; and conſequently, in the more general Senſe of the Word, inexpedient. This may account, in ſome meaſure, for the Queſtion before us, *viz.* "If

" a Revelation be expedient, Why was it " not ſooner made? "

The Revelation I am ſpeaking of being a Divine Manifeſtation and Enforcement of ſome general Rule of Life intended for the general Uſe of the World, could not properly be made, whilſt Mankind were incapable of applying it to this Purpoſe; whilſt they wanted ſufficient Means either to preſerve it in its Purity, or to tranſmit it ſafely to future Ages.

We know how difficult it muſt be to preſerve any Syſtem incorrupt in the Way of Oral Tradition. Rules may eaſily be forgotten, or miſapprehended; Errors will creep in inſenſibly, and ſometimes be introduc'd by Fraud. It was proper therefore that the Fate of ſuch a Revelation ſhould not be truſted to this uncertain Way; and conſequently, that it ſhould not be made, 'till Men had diſcover'd ſome ſurer Method of recording it. From whence it follows, that the Invention of Letters muſt reaſonably come before ſuch a Revelation, as being the beſt, and indeed the only Expedient, we know of, to preſerve a Truth inviolate.

And here I have the Pleaſure of obſerving, That the Reaſonings offer'd, are confirm'd by ſtrong Appearances of Fact. In all Probability, a Revelation was actually made within ſome ſhort Time after the Diſcovery of Letters; as ſoon as the Uſe of them was well

well known, and they were capable of being apply'd to general and common Service. Thus much is certain, that ſome of the Sacred Writings are the Oldeſt Books now extant in the World: And poſſibly, the very firſt that were ever wrote, contain in them ſuch a Revelation as I am now defending. If this prove true, then the Difficulty before us vaniſhes. Upon this Suppoſition, a Revelation there was as ſoon as it could be made for the Service of Mankind; and conſequently, as ſoon as it was fit and proper to make it.

I muſt allow indeed, that this Revelation made to *Moſes*, was intended for the more eſpecial Service of the Jews. It contain'd, over-and-above the general Rules of Life, their national Law; and of Conſequence, muſt, in a great Part of it, be peculiar to that People. Yet ſtill, it was not ſo entirely reſtrain'd to them, as to be unknown to others. It was the publick Profeſſion of a People which made no inconſiderable Figure; which had, for ſeveral Ages, a great Weight with their neighbouring Nations: And afterwards, when their State was ruin'd, they had greater Opportunities than ever of ſpreading the Knowledge of the True God. The Captives, who were diſpers'd, carry'd their Religion with them; They retain'd it in ſome meaſure, no doubt; and therefore, may be ſuppos'd to have given the ignorant

World ſome better Notions of Things than they had before. Or, if it ſhould be thought that theſe Perſons were too little acquainted with their Religion, to make any great Diſcoveries of it, (as a great many of them perhaps were); yet after their Reſtoration, Things were put on a better Foot. The Law was better known and underſtood after the Erection of Synagogues; and the People had a more free Intercourſe with remote Nations than formerly. There were few Countries of any conſiderable Figure in which there was not a competent Number of Jews reſiding, by whom the ſeveral Particulars of their Religion might be, and probably were communicated to the World. From this View of Matters, we may conclude, that the Jewiſh Law, tho' made originally to a particular People, and in ſeveral Branches of it proper to that People, was not confin'd to them alone. It might be, and probably was known in a good Degree almoſt everywhere. Thoſe, amongſt whom the Jews liv'd, might profit much by their Inſtructions: Many Parts of what hath been reckon'd the moſt excellent Philoſophy, might be deriv'd from them, or corrected by them; and the Religion, which is now call'd Natural Religion, in its laſt Reſort, be built on Reveal'd. At leaſt thus much may be preſum'd, that as the moſt eminent of the Philoſophers travell'd in Queſt of Wiſdom, and embrac'd all Opportunities

portunities of improving themſelves, ſo they did not entirely overlook the Religion of a People ſo numerous as the Jews were, and ſo ſtrongly recommended by the Appearances of a Divine Original. Or, if this ſhould not really prove the Caſe, yet one Thing muſt be allow'd me, That the ſeveral Parts of the World in which the Jews were diſpers'd, were not ſo much Strangers to their Books, as to know Nothing of what was contain'd in them: They muſt be appriz'd of this, That they expected a *Meſſias*; and ſo ſingular an Expectation would naturally lead them to enquire ſomewhat into the Grounds of it. If therefore there were none other Advantages ariſing to the reſt of Mankind from the Manifeſtations formerly made to the Jews, yet this at leaſt is conſiderable, That they prepar'd the Way to another Diſpenſation, of a more extenſive Nature, the Chriſtian.

This indeed was not given 'till the Reign of *Tiberius*: But no Prejudice will ariſe from hence, if it be conſider'd, That the Time of giving it was, upon ſeveral Accounts, more fit and proper than any which had gone before it. I ſhall mention only Two: *viz.* That the State of the World was ſuch, as made a Revelation at that Time, 1. More likely to be attended to, and embrac'd; and, 2. More eaſily ſpread thro' the ſeveral Parts of the World.

I have mention'd above, That the World had been gradually prepar'd for the Coming of a Great Law-giver, by the Intercourſe which the Jews had with other Nations, and their ſeveral Settlements amongſt them. And in this we are confirm'd by ſome Teſtimonies which remain even in Heathen Writers. At preſent I am to note, That as Politeneſs, Civility, and Learning were now at their Height, ſo there was excited in Mankind a greater Curioſity than had been ever known before. Their Capacity of being wrought upon was greater, and their Inclination to learn more vigorous. They had now ſeen what Philoſophy could do: They were more ſenſible of its Defects, in Proportion to the Improvements they had made in it; and conſequently, muſt be preſum'd more ready to hearken to ſome ſurer Guide. Agreeably we find that the Philoſophers, with whom St. *Paul* debated at *Athens*, gave him a patient Hearing, ſome of them being curious enough to promiſe a ſecond; [See *Acts* xvii. 32.] And tho' the mere Novelty of a Reſurrection ſtartled them at firſt, yet, upon farther Thought, it might appear, that ordinary Meaſures are not to be obſerv'd upon extraordinary Occaſions. Difficulties enough there were in gaining a thorough Admiſſion of this Religion; But yet, in any other Seaſon it would, probably, have been more difficult; in any other Seaſon, when

when Men had not been ſufficiently prepar'd for ſomewhat of this Nature; or were ſo exceedingly indolent and incurious as to afford no Attention to it.

This Reflexion ſhall be ſeconded by obſerving, that the Circumſtances of the World favour'd this Religion in another Reſpect, *viz.* That they made the Promulgation of it more eaſy and extenſive. The *Roman* Arms had prevail'd over a great Part of the known World. They had ſubdu'd many large Provinces, both in *Europe*, *Aſia*, and *Africk*, and erected an Empire of prodigious Extent. The Government was now pretty well ſettled: And, as their Empire was vaſtly large, and the Affairs of it compos'd, ſo there muſt have been a more free Intercourſe between the ſeveral Nations than had been ever known before. Who doth not diſcern, that this was a fitter Time to ſpread the Knowledge of a Revelation, than whilſt the Jealouſies which ſubſiſted between different Nations prevented a Correſpondence, or Civil Diſtractions would allow no Room for Religious Enquiries? This, I think, is plain and certain; and therefore muſt inſiſt on it, that no ſufficient Objection can be alledg'd againſt making the Revelation at this Time, unleſs it be ſhewn, that ſome former Times were more proper. Men might indeed want it ſooner: But, in relieving Wants, it ought to be remember'd, that there is a Suitableneſs of

of the Time as well as a Uſefulneſs of the Thing; and that the Kindneſs in doing a Favour is then moſt eminent, when the Effects of it will be moſt general and certain.

The Second Branch of our Author's Objection, is This; A Revelation, if expedient, ought to extend itſelf to every thing which is for the Good of Mankind; and be given not as it were grudgingly, by little and little. This Branch muſt reſpect, not the Chriſtian Revelation, which was given at once, and contains one perfect Scheme, but the ſeveral Occaſional Revelations which were granted in former Times; and ſeems to allude to a Paſſage in the Epiſtle to the *Hebrews*, where it is aſſerted, that *God who at ſundry Times, and in divers Manners, ſpake in Times paſt unto our Fathers by the Prophets, hath in theſe laſt Days ſpoken unto us by his Son.*

Upon this I muſt obſerve, that, if the Lateneſs of a Revelation may be defended, and no ſufficient Objection can ariſe from hence, that God did not manifeſt himſelf in an extraordinary Manner ſooner; then we may equally account for the Point before us, *viz.* That every Revelation vouchſafed to Man hath not been compleat: For this is certain, In all Caſes where God may, if He pleaſes, vouchſafe no Revelation at all, or defer the Time of giving it, there he may vouchſafe it, if granted, in any aſſignable Meaſure;

Meaſure; and the Reaſons which will ſupport the one, muſt, *à fortiori*, ſupport the other likewiſe. A Revelation, we affirm, is expedient: But how? Not at all Times equally; nor yet to all Perſons equally; If this be true of a Revelation in the general, then the Revelation of a compleat and perfect Scheme was not equally expedient at all Times. Or, if we ſhould ſuppoſe, that the Knowledge of it would be equally uſeful at all Times, yet a great many other Circumſtances muſt come into Conſideration, which may ſerve to determine as well the Meaſure of Light proper to be vouchſafed, as the Time and Seaſon of giving it.

1. Then, I affirm, that ſeveral Revelations in different Ages of the World, may be ſuited to the Condition and Exigences of the ſeveral Times. Thus, after the Flood, when one Family only was preſerv'd, ſome general Rules, to be obſerv'd univerſally in future Times, might properly be given: For, as all the future Race of Men deſcended from this Family, ſuch Rules, if few and ſimple, might be eaſily taught and retain'd. Agreeably, the Scripture teaches, that God delivered theſe Directions to *Noah* and his Sons; [See *Gen.* 9.] 1. That they might eat Fleſh, as well as Vegetables. 2. That they ſhould abſtain from Blood. 3. That Murther ſhould be puniſh'd with Death. To which was added a Promiſe, that the World ſhould no more

be deſtroy'd by Water. Theſe Things are diſtinctly mentioned: But who doth not ſee the Fitneſs of declaring theſe Particulars at ſuch a Time as this? And, if Nothing elſe was Matter of Revelation at that Time, I may be allow'd to preſume, Either that the Circumſtances of Mankind did not make it needful; or elſe, that, in ſome reſpect or other, to us unknown, they would not admit of it.

Afterwards we find God was pleaſed to favour *Abraham* with ſome ſpecial Communications. Theſe were in a good Meaſure perſonal, and intended to preſerve one Family at leaſt from the general Corruption. To this Purpoſe He was order'd to withdraw himſelf from his native Country, and ſettle at a Diſtance; to encourage him in which, he had the Promiſe of eſpecial Favour from God. Here indeed we do not ſee any Points of Doctrine, or general Precepts deliver'd, for which there might be none Occaſion. The Intent of Providence in this Caſe was, to preſerve a good Man from Danger. This extraordinary Care might be built, not only on the great Virtue and Merit of the Man, but likewiſe on This, that perhaps the Family of *Abraham* might be the only one which remain'd untainted. This, at leaſt, is certain, That, according to the Determinations of Providence, this Family was deſign'd to preſerve the Knowledge of God, and to be in future Time the Inſtruments of a general Revelation,

velation. This God afterwards declar'd, when he made him this Promiſe, *In thy Seed ſhall all the Nations of the Earth be bleſſed.* [Gen. xxii. 18.]

Let us paſs on to the Revelation made by God to *Moſes*. Here was a Body of Laws deliver'd; A Syſtem of moral Precepts, of religious Ceremonies, and of political Rules. Whether theſe were not highly proper, and agreeable to the Wants and Temper of the People concern'd in them, may appear, in a good meaſure, from conſidering their Circumſtances: And, if every Thing may not be clear'd up this Way, we may conclude the Wiſdom of each particular Branch from the appearing Wiſdom of the Whole.

Notwithſtanding this, our Author will, perhaps, inſiſt, that, however ſuitable theſe ſeveral Revelations might be to the Times in which they were made, yet the Diſcovery of ſeveral other Matters might be equally ſuitable: And, if a Revelation be expedient, in the Senſe we are contending for, then ſuch a Revelation muſt be equally ſuitable to all Perſons, and at all Times.

If this be alledg'd, it will be ſufficient to reply, that ſome Things, which if deliver'd at one Time would not be receiv'd, may yet be admitted at another Time, after due Preparation made for them. This, I think, is ſo evident in other Caſes, that it cannot, with any Shew, be diſputed. It is daily ſeen in

in the Study of the Arts and Sciences, and indeed in the Eſtabliſhment of political Inſtitutions: Why then may not the ſame be preſum'd in the preſent Caſe? Do we know the real State of Mankind in all Ages of the World ſo well as to determine peremptorily that This was not the Caſe? Is not the Supreme Judge and Governor of the World fitter to ſettle this Matter than we are? If this be ſo, then the Objection before us is not drawn from the Nature of Things, but our own Ignorance.

I am farther confirm'd in the preſent Account from hence, That moſt of the Revelations formerly made were, in Truth preparatory to the Chriſtian. They were either direct Promiſes that Something of this Kind ſhould be hereafter given, or elſe they were in ſome other reſpects very proper Introductions of it: And therefore St. *Paul* aſſerts of the Jewiſh Religion, *That the Law was our School-maſter to bring us unto Chriſt.* [Gal. iii. 24.]

I ſhall paſs from hence to the Third Branch of our Author's Objection; If a Revelation be expedient, then, as it ought to be granted at all Times, and in the fulleſt Manner, ſo likewiſe to every Perſon alike. Not to one favourite Nation only, or to a ſmall Part of Mankind, the Bulk of them to this Day remaining in deplorable Ignorance.

As to the Part which the Jews have in the preſent Objection, I have noted Something concerning

concerning it before, when I obſerv'd, that, notwithſtanding the Law deliver'd by *Moſes* reſpected the Jews more immediately, yet it was not confin'd to them alone; and that probably a great Part of the World might receive no ſmall Profit from it. There will be none Occaſion that I ſhould offer any Thing farther on that particular Caſe. The Objection, if there be any thing in it, bears full as hard on the Chriſtian Revelation, which, 'tis own'd, hath not yet been receiv'd univerſally; and perhaps the far greater Part of the World are Strangers to it to this very Day. This deſerves to be conſider'd, and I ſhall make my Reply by the following Steps.

1. No Objection can be made againſt the Chriſtian Revelation, from the mere Conſideration of its not being *receiv'd* univerſally. No Force of Proof, no not Demonſtration itſelf can prevail with every one. Men may ſhut their Eyes, and refuſe to conſider; and they will be diſpos'd to do ſo, where irregular Paſſions ſhall render the Truths to be prov'd unacceptable. A Revelation therefore, however ſtrong the Evidence of it may be, may be rejected. This cannot be otherwiſe, ſo long as human Freedom remains; ſo long as God deals with Men as rational Creatures, and does not force Proof upon them, whether they are willing to admit it or no. The Difficulty therefore ariſing from this Objection muſt reſt, not on the imperfect Reception,

tion, but the imperfect Promulgation of the Goſpel.

2. Let us obſerve, Secondly, That notwithſtanding the Goſpel hath not yet been promulgated univerſally, yet it ſhall one Time or other be offer'd to every one. Something of this Nature is intimated to us by our Bleſſed Lord himſelf, who declar'd, *Jeruſalem ſhall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the Time of the Gentiles be fulfilled.* [Luke xxi, 24.] And more clearly by St. *Paul*, *I would not, Brethren, that ye ſhould be ignorant of this Myſtery, that Blindneſs in part is happened to Iſrael, until the Fulneſs of the Gentiles be come in.* [Rom. 11. 25.] Upon this Foot we affirm, that the Goſpel ſhall ſome Time or other be univerſally promulgated: And, conſequently, no Objection can be drawn from this Circumſtance, but what ariſes from the Novelty of the Revelation itſelf; which, if it be inſufficient in the former Reſpect, it muſt equally be ſo in this.

3. If the Goſpel ſhall hereafter be promulgated univerſally; then, as we know not how long this World ſhall laſt, we cannot ſay but this gradual Promulgation of the Goſpel may bear a due Proportion to the Age and Continuance of the World. About Seventeen Hundred Years are already paſs'd ſince the firſt Delivery of our Religion; and how many Ages more may be requir'd for its full Promulgation we know not. This Extent

of

of Time looks great in our Accounts of Things. But yet, if the World ſhould continue for Millions of Ages, (as no Man can prove it ſhall not) Two or Three Thouſand Years might be conſider'd as Nothing. There is an Expreſſion in Scripture, which contains deep Truth in it as well as Beauty. *One Day is with the Lord as a Thouſand Years, and a Thouſand Years as one Day.* It is built on this, that *Great* and *Small* are relative Terms, and depend on the Proportion which one Thing bears to another with which it is compar'd. The few Years of our Infancy might be thought a very conſiderable Time, were the ordinary Term of human Life much ſhorter; whereas, upon the preſent State of Things, it appears otherwiſe. Let the Seaſon of the preſent imperfect Promulgation of the Goſpel be conſider'd as the Infancy of the Chriſtian State: In that View, no ſufficient Objections can be rais'd, upon Suppoſition that it ſhall flouriſh for Millions of Ages in full Maturity; none, but what may equally be urg'd againſt the State of Infancy in the Conſideration of human Life.

4. Let us conſider, Fourthly, that, at the firſt Publication of the Goſpel, the Preachers of it were endued with ſeveral miraculous Powers, which ſerv'd them as well to ſpread and propagate this Religion, as to prove and ſupport it. This was neceſſary at firſt, in order to give it a firm Footing, and to gain

a ſufficient Settlement. When this was done, as all was effected which neceſſarily requir'd a miraculous Power, ſo theſe extraordinary Powers ceaſed. When abundant Evidence had been given of this Religion, and it was embrac'd by a competent Number of Perſons, it was left to make its Way by human Means. In theſe Circumſtances, it is the Buſineſs of thoſe who enjoy this Light, to impart it to others. Somewhat to this Purpoſe is attempted daily; and more would be, if that Spirit prevail'd with Us, which animated the firſt Propagators of Chriſtianity. Yet, if all be not done which might and ought to be ſo, we alone are to blame; and the Objection rather lies againſt the Conduct of Men, than the Adminiſtrations of Providence. But,

5. The Circumſtances of the World are ſuch, that 'tis impoſſible to promulgate this Religion univerſally but by Length of Time, and ſlow Degrees. The Intercourſe we have with many Heathen People is ſmall; their Languages to us unknown; and, perhaps, ſo barren, many of them, as to want Improvement for the Conveyance of religious Notions. As the Ignorance of Heathens is great, ſo their Prejudices are great likewiſe; and, as they are utterly unacquainted with the Credit of thoſe Hiſtories on which the Evidence of the Chriſtian Faith is built, ſo it cannot be any eaſy Matter to make a Progreſs in this Affair. The Converſion of Heathens therefore muſt

muſt be the Work of Time. A more free Intercourſe with them muſt be open'd; Arts and Sciences cultivated; their Languages known and improv'd; And, as theſe Means are gradually carry'd on, we may hope for a Succeſs proportionable.

Yet, however this be, I conceive, Laſtly, the Conduct of the Supreme Being will be ſufficiently juſtify'd from hence, That God will deal with Men in Proportion to the Advantages they enjoy. They who are without this Law ſhall be judg'd without it, and they who enjoy this Law ſhall be judg'd by it. As therefore Men are not made accountable to God merely for not having it, ſo neither can God be accountable for not granting it. His Proceedings in this reſpect are entirely in his own Power; And therefore, as he may beſtow or not beſtow a Revelation, as he pleaſes, ſo He is the moſt proper Judge When and to Whom to grant it. This Conſideration is ſufficient of itſelf, unleſs our Adverſaries will undertake to prove, That the grand Scheme of Things, from the Beginning to the End, is entirely inconſiſtent with the making any Revelation at all; or the making it ſo late; or the making it gradually; or the promulgating it imperfectly. For, if the doing all theſe be conſiſtent with this great and wiſe Scheme, then a Revelation, under all the Circumſtances objected againſt, there may be; and, if the

Scheme itſelf ſhall require it, then there muſt be.

The *ſecond* Objection againſt the Expedience of a Revelation, which I propos'd to examine, was This; The Revelaton we are ſpeaking of, hath not anſwer'd thoſe Purpoſes for which we affirm it to have been expedient. It occurs, p. 404. "What impartial "Man, who hath compar'd the former and "preſent Condition of Mankind, can think "the World much mended ſince the Times "of *Tiberius*; or, tho' ever ſo well vers'd "in Church-Hiſtory, can, from the Conduct "of Chriſtians, find that they are arriv'd to "any higher State of Perfection than the "reſt of Mankind, who are ſuppos'd to "continue in their Degeneracy and Corruption?" And afterwards; "What in moſt "Places paſſes for the Chriſtian Religion, "if not the chiefeſt Part of it, has tranſform'd this ſocial and benign Creature "into one fierce and cruel; and made him "act with ſuch Rage and Fury againſt thoſe "who never did, nor deſign'd him any "Injury, as could not have enter'd into the "Hearts of Men to conceive, even though "they were in the unavoidable State of "Degeneracy and Corruption?" p. 405.

Our Author here aſſerts, 1. In general, That Chriſtians are not at all better than Heathens. And, 2. That they are in ſome reſpects worſe.

As

As to what he aſſerts under the former Head, whether it relate to Heathens before the Times of *Tiberius*, or in the preſent Age, it might be ſufficient to deny, as roundly as he affirms; and to refer the Thing, without more Ado, to any impartial Conſiderer. Only this ſhould be remember'd, That when we compare the Lives of Chriſtians with the Lives of Heathens; by Chriſtian, we ought to underſtand, not thoſe who are merely Nominal, without having any real Knowledge, or juſt Apprehenſions of our Religion: And therefore we ought to ſtrike out of the Account, 1. Thoſe who have nothing elſe to ſhew for their Religion but their being baptiz'd. And, 2. Thoſe who have corrupted our Religion in any notorious Degree. So far as Men alter Chriſtianity, ſo far they ceaſe to be Chriſtians; and conſequently, thoſe Faults which ariſe from Corruptions of this Kind, are not chargeable to the Account of our Religion. To which I may add farther, That in making the Compariſon, we ought to conſider Men as plac'd on an equal Foot in every other reſpect. A wiſe and learned Heathen may carry ſeveral Points farther than an illiterate, tho' well-meaning Chriſtian. To come at the Truth, and to learn whether any Advantages have ariſen from the Chriſtian Inſtitution, Let us ſee how Men behave in the general, under the ſeveral Perſuaſions of Heatheniſm and Chriſtianity; or, if par-

ticular Perſons are to be compar'd, then let them be choſen fairly.

On theſe Conditions, I may truſt the Cauſe to the Judgment of any impartial Man. Let him examine Hiſtory, and determine upon the Point. This I may do, notwithſtanding ſeveral worthy Perſons have, in a Heat of Zeal, and to preſs Chriſtians to a greater Circumſpection, ſometimes expreſs'd themſelves incautiouſly. Let our Author cite as many Paſſages of this Kind as he pleaſes, I ſhall yet maintain what I have aſſerted, as knowing from the Nature of Things, that the Point which he inſiſts on is impoſſible.

For, let us conſider; Have not Chriſtians the ſame common Reaſon with Heathens? or, Does this Gentleman think that Infidels are the only Men of Senſe? If this be the Caſe, then, as Chriſtianity doth not impair their Reaſon, and as all the moral Concluſions of Reaſon are Parts of Chriſtianity, and confirm'd by it, Both are ſo far as this upon the Level. But, when we conſider, that many Things which are remotely concluded by Reaſon, are plainly laid down in the Scriptures; that others are there deliver'd, which cannot be concluded by our Reaſon at all; and that there are ſeveral Motives to a virtuous Life peculiar to Chriſtianity; it will appear, that all other Things being equal, the Chriſtian muſt as far exceed the Heathen, as Chriſtian Light exceeds Heathen Light;

Light: And to affirm the contrary, will imply the ſame as to affirm, that Unequals being added to Equals, the Produce will be Equal.

The Gentleman advances farther, and affirms, *2dly*, That Chriſtians are in ſome reſpects worſe than Heathens. But How doth he ſupport this? Why, by obſerving, "That what in moſt Places paſſes for the "Chriſtian Religion, if not the chiefeſt "Part of it, has transform'd the ſocial and "benign Creature into one fierce and "cruel," and, in ſhort, made him act with ſuch Rage and Fury as could not have enter'd into the Heart of an Heathen. But, is this aſſerted of pure, and genuine Chriſtianity? Are there any Precepts of Cruelty to be found in the Goſpel? On the contrary; Are not Matters of Charity carry'd ſo far by it, that this very Gentleman complains of it on that very Account? How then comes this Imputation to be inſinuated againſt Real Chriſtianity, which can only belong to Nominal? His Words are; "What paſſes for the Chriſtian Religion, *&c.* "makes Men fierce." Be it ſo; Chriſtianity doth not effect this: But Chriſtianity corrupted, or that which is not real Chriſtianity, may do ſo. Pray, What Concluſion can be drawn from hence? —— That Chriſtianity is miſchievous? No, certainly; unleſs this Gentleman will charge all the

Abſurdities of abus'd and diſtorted Reaſon to the Account of genuine, and well-conducted Reaſon.

Still our Gentleman will tell us, What Good hath real Chriſtianity done all this while, if it could not prevent ſuch Cruelties as mere uninſtructed Reaſon muſt condemn; if it could not hinder its Profeſſors from acting worſe than Heathens themſelves have ever done? But will this Gentleman ſay, That no Cruelties were ever practis'd among the Heathens? Or will he affirm, That they were not ſo generally practis'd; or, not to ſuch a Degree? Surely, he cannot be ſo much a Stranger to the Ten Perſecutions; in which the Heathen Governors rag'd againſt their Chriſtian Subjects, who had never done them any Injury, and upon no Score whatſoever but their profeſſing a Religion different from the eſtabliſh'd. No Perſecutions of Chriſtians which have happen'd ſince can over-match theſe; And therefore it cannot be affirm'd, that thoſe who are call'd Chriſtians, have in this reſpect outdone thoſe who were real Heathens.

After all, It is too true, and muſt not be deny'd, that moſt horrid Cruelties have ſometimes been practis'd by Perſons profeſſing Chriſtianity, and perhaps under Pretence of Zeal for their Religion. But, can it be concluded from hence, that Chriſtianity hath done no Good? If it cannot fully work

work its proper Effects upon all Men, muſt it therefore be entirely fruitleſs? No, certainly: All that can be juſtly inferr'd, is This; Some Perſons may corrupt themſelves to ſuch a Degree, as to make their Cure deſperate: Such may receive little Benefit from the Religion they profeſs. But let me ask, Would theſe Men be leſs degenerate in a State of Heatheniſm? Would an ill-natur'd and cruel Man find none Occaſions of Miſchief, unleſs the Conſiderations of Religion ſupply'd them? This cannot be ſaid: Why then muſt our Religion be accus'd, for not doing that, which cannot be effected by any Cauſe whatſoever, which doth not deſtroy Mens Liberty?

Upon the Whole, Let the Faults of Chriſtians be aggravated as much as this Gentleman pleaſes; yet ſtill I am perſwaded, where Chriſtianity hath any tolerable Footing, Men will be found not only to think more juſtly, but to act more virtuouſly, than an equal Number of Men have been found to do in the Heathen World. His Accuſations are founded on a Falſity in Fact; and conſequently, cannot affect the Cauſe of Chriſtianity at all.

CHAP.

CHAP. IX.

Whether there be ſufficient Evidence of the Reality of a Revelation, and eſpecially of the Chriſtian.

I SHALL introduce what may be proper to be offer'd on this Queſtion, with obſerving, That if the ſeveral Points already inſiſted on are made good; and eſpecially, if, conſidering the Condition of Human Nature, an extraordinary Revelation of the Divine Will be expedient; then one or other of the following Concluſions may be drawn; Either, 1. That ſuch a Revelation hath already been granted us in Fact: Or elſe, 2. If Nothing of this Kind hath been granted hitherto, yet we may reaſonably hope and expect it in ſome future Time.

I do by no means determine abſolutely for the former; nor argue, that becauſe a Revelation may have been highly uſeful and deſirable,

deſirable, therefore the Reality of a paſt Revelation may certainly be concluded. I am ſenſible this would run me on Difficulties, and oblige me to maintain the abſolute Neceſſity of a Revelation on God's Part. On this Suppoſition it will be impoſſible to avoid the Conſequence which our Author alledges, that a Revelation muſt be univerſal.

I contend therefore, from the Conſideration before us, for no more than This; That probably a Divine Revelation either hath been already, or will be hereafter granted us: And therefore, as this is, in a reaſonable Account of Things, probable, it becomes every Man to examine the Pretences to it impartially. Were the Thing in itſelf impoſſible; or, tho' not abſolutely impoſſible, yet highly improbable; it might be thought there would be none Occaſion to examine ſuch Pretences at all: Then every Thing of this Kind might be rejected at once, as offering a manifeſt Affront to our Reaſon. But ſince the Caſe is otherwiſe; Since Probability lies on the other Side of the Queſtion; To be entirely careleſs, is inexcuſable: For it expreſſes a Contempt of that Being, whoſe Will we are concern'd as well to learn, as to obey.

Over and above what hath been juſt now obſerv'd, I might go on, and alledge ſome preſumptive Proofs, that God hath not left Men entirely to themſelves; that he hath given

given them ſome Preſcriptions in an extraordinary Way; or, in other Words, that ſome Divine Revelation hath been granted Men already: Which if it ſhall appear to be extremely probable, then the Way will be clear'd to thoſe Arguments by which we ſupport our Religion; For, if a Revelation be allow'd in ſome Inſtances, What Prejudices can ariſe againſt granting it in others?

It will be needleſs to alledge every Thing which might be pertinently offer'd to this Purpoſe. However, not to let this Matter paſs entirely, I ſhall take the Liberty to demand, How we can account for the Origine of Sacrifices? Of theſe there have indeed been different Sorts, and attended with different Ceremonies, agreeable to the Humour of the ſeveral Perſons who have offer'd them. Yet it is remarkable, that 'till *Jeſus Chriſt* appear'd, (who, in our Account of Things, anſwer'd the Intent of all Sacrifices by the Sacrifice of himſelf), I ſay, 'till this Time, ſcarce any Place or Age can be aſſign'd, in which ſome Sacrifices, of one Kind or other, have not been offer'd.

But Whence, I deſire to know, could this ariſe? Was it from the Nature and Reaſon of the Thing? This will not be affirm'd by the Gentleman I am contending with, who would repreſent the Practice as ridiculous. Here indeed I muſt differ from him widely: For I cannot ſee that there is any Abſurdity

Abſurdity in the Matter; any Thing contrary to the Principles of Reaſon. But ſtill, Would mere Reaſon have led Men to it? Would it have taught them that This was the only, or the beſt Method of Propitiating the Deity; and conſequently, that the making theſe Offerings was a neceſſary and indiſpenſible Duty? If not, then How came it paſs that this Inſtitution ſhould prevail univerſally?

We ſhall be told perhaps, It was the Invention of Prieſts, who made great Advantages to themſelves from Sacrifices. Yet ſtill the Difficulty will return, How came it to paſs that all Prieſts, in almoſt all Parts and Ages of the World, have enter'd into this Method? Could Nothing elſe be invented of as gainful a Nature? Or was this Method more plain and obvious than any other?

Let us turn the Matter which Way we pleaſe, it will be ſcarce poſſible to ſolve the Difficulty but by ſuppoſing, that this Practice aroſe originally from ſome Divine Appointment. This will clear up all at once. In this Caſe, what was made known by Revelation to the firſt Man, would be practis'd by him with Care: His Children would be taught to worſhip God this Way: The Practice, thus taught, would be retain'd for Subſtance, into whatever diſtant Parts of the World they ſhould remove: And, tho' in Tract of Time

Time great Corruptions might happen, and many Variations be made from the original Inſtitution, yet the more general Parts of the Inſtitution might remain: Sacrifices might be offer'd every-where, and be reckon'd, (as in Fact they have been), one of the principal Parts of Worſhip. I cannot forbear alledging this as a preſumptive Evidence of a Revelation; becauſe the Univerſality of Sacrifices is much better accounted for this Way, than by referring the Matter to the Dictates of Reaſon, or the Artifice of Prieſts.

Some Revelation then probably hath been: But the Argument now produc'd concludes for no other than a Revelation as to one particular Inſtance: This indeed falls vaſtly ſhort of the Point I am contending for; and therefore muſt be only conſider'd as Preparatory to my main Deſign.

The great Queſtion which I have all along had in View, and which is here to be conſider'd diſtinctly, is, Whether the Religion we embrace be really founded on a Divine Revelation: Whether *Jeſus Chriſt* were a Perſon ſent from God, or not: and conſequently, Whether the Scheme of Doctrines and Precepts deliver'd by him ought to be receiv'd on the Foot of a a Divine Authority.

To determine This, Writers have frequently taken the following Method, *viz.* To conſider, 1. The Internal Evidence of the

the Religion. And, 2. The External Proof by which it is confirm'd.

As to the former Head, I conceive, the Terms in which it is expreſs'd are not quite ſo proper; and that for this Reaſon, becauſe, ſtrictly ſpeaking, there can be no *internal Evidence* of a Revelation at all. For, I would deſire to know, What can be concluded from the Nature of any Doctrines or Precepts deliver'd? Why, This only, That they are Either true or falſe; and if true, that it muſt be the Will of God they ſhould be receiv'd as ſuch. Be it ſo; yet doth it follow from hence, they muſt therefore be reveal'd? No, certainly: Several of the ſame Points which are inculcated in the Goſpels, are contain'd likewiſe in the Writings of the Philoſophers. The internal Evidence of their Truth muſt be the ſame in both: But were they equally reveal'd to both Kinds of Writers? No; The one learn'd them from Divine Revelation; the other from Principles of human Reaſon: The One produce full Proof a Divine Commiſſion; the Other alledge nothing of that Kind at all. Upon this I muſt affirm, that external Proof is the only direct Evidence of a Revelation; and that all Concluſions drawn from the Nature of the ſeveral Doctrines or Precepts amount to nothing more than a Condition, or *Cauſa ſine quâ non*, as being

as being that without which no external Evidence ſhould be admitted.

To proceed; There is nothing in the Chriſtian Scheme which makes it abſolutely impoſſible to be true; It contains nothing inconſiſtent with itſelf, or contradictory to any ſure Principle of Reaſon. If it did, no external Evidence would be ſufficient. What is falſe in itſelf, cannot be prov'd true by any Arguments whatſoever: And therefore, were any Things of this Kind produc'd, we ſhould be forc'd to maintain, Either that the Points alledg'd were Corruptions of Chriſtianity; —— or, if this might not be ſuppos'd, That the Religion itſelf was an Impoſture. For, no Man can have greater Evidence that any Miracles have been ever wrought, than he hath already, that a Religion which contains Contradictions muſt be falſe.

But Nothing of this Kind can be charg'd on our Religion. It propoſes to us the nobleſt End, and the moſt ſuitable Means. Its Doctrines have all of them an Influence upon our Practice. And the Precepts which it delivers, are either founded on the Natures of Things; or, if ſome few of them are poſitive, they are far from being uſeleſs. Thoſe Points which are proveable from Principles of Natural Light, can create no Difficulty; and Others, concerning which Nothing can be determin'd from thence, may (for any Thing we know) be true. To which may

be

be added, That as the ſeveral Particulars of our Religion, ſeparately taken, are unexceptionable, ſo there is ſuch an Harmony and Correſpondency of its Parts, as makes the whole Scheme beautiful.

If then the Matter of our Religion be ſuch, as makes it capable of external Proof, we are concern'd to Enquire What Proof of that Kind it has. Now the Evidence to be produc'd is that of Miracles; From which I do by no means exclude Prophecies, which may be conſider'd as one Sort of Miracles: They exceed any Powers of human Nature; and have juſt the ſame Force in Proof as other Miracles have, *viz.* as being ſupernatural Atteſtations of a Divine Commiſſion. This therefore being the Foundation on which I build, it will be proper that I ſhould enquire,

1. Whether any Miracles have been really wrought in Favour of our Religion. And,

2. What Force there is in the Argument deduc'd from thence.

Before I proceed to the particular Diſcuſſion of the firſt Queſtion, I muſt clear the Way, by removing ſuch Prejudices as may be ſuppos'd to lie againſt this Kind of Proof. The Gentleman I am contending with laughs at Miracles, and would repreſent every Thing of that Nature as ridiculous. To this Purpoſe, he tells us, "It was a proverbial Saying among the

" ſophers of *Greece*, Θαύματα μώροις, Mi-
" racles for Fools, and Reaſons for Wiſe
" Men. The *Bœotians* were remarkable for
" their Stupidity, and the Number of their
" Oracles: And if you look no farther than
" the Chriſtian World, you will find that
" Ignorance, and the Belief of daily Mi-
" racles, go hand in hand; and that there
" is nothing too abſurd for the Peoples
" Belief." p. 192.

The Gentleman hath here expreſs'd a great Contempt of Miracles: *Miracles* (ſays he) *for Fools.* Which Words, tho' cited from ſome of the *Greek* Philoſophers, he makes his own by the Application. And if we demand what Reaſon he alledges for this Proceeding, the Anſwer is, Weak Men are frequently impos'd on, and apt to take thoſe Things for Miracles, which are only Cheats. But, what then? Muſt this paſs for a Reaſon; and can there be no real Miracles, becauſe ſome Men will be apt to credit feign'd ones? No, certainly; and therefore, if the Gentleman be really in earneſt, he muſt build on one or other of theſe Principles; Either, 1. That Miracles are abſolutely and in themſelves impoſſible; or elſe, 2. That there can be no ſufficient Cauſe or Reaſon for working them.

Miracles are ſupernatural Effects; *i. e.* ſuch as being above the natural Powers of any viſible Agents, or evidently not pro-

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duc'd by them, are contrary to the general Laws of God's acting upon Matter, or at leaſt cannot be accounted for by any Compoſition or Reſult of thoſe Laws. The Queſtion therefore at preſent, is This; Whether Effects of this Kind are abſolutely impoſſible. If they are ſo, they muſt imply a Contradiction; and it concerns our Adverſaries to ſhew Where the Contradiction lies. Is there any Inconſiſtency in affirming, that Effects above the Powers of viſible Agents may yet be perform'd by inviſible; or, that Effects may be produc'd without any viſible Means at all; or, that the general Laws of Nature may be ſuſpended or controul'd; or laſtly, that Things may be done which cannot be accounted for by any Compoſition or Reſult of thoſe Laws? Can any one prove that there are no inviſible Beings? or, if there be, that they enjoy no Powers beyond human? or, that they cannot exert theſe Powers in the Affairs of the World? If any of theſe Poſitions could be prov'd, we muſt then yield our Point: But if the contrary may be true, then Miracles may be wrought; and of the Poſſibility of this we have as clear an Idea, as we have of any ordinary Effect whatſoever.

Miracles, I have ſaid, are ſuch Effects, as are either contrary to the general Laws of God's acting upon Matter, or cannot reſult from them. If this Account be true,

the Poſſibility of Miracles muſt be apparent: For, if the Laws of Nature are none other than the general Method of God's acting upon Matter, which Method is not in itſelf, and abſolutely neceſſary; then 'tis certain God may either ſuſpend his Action entirely, or act, upon particular Emergencies, in whatever different Manner he pleaſes. Upon this View, it is clear, that the working of Miracles may not require in the Supreme Being the Exertion of any greater Power than what is neceſſary in ordinary Operations; and conſequently, we may conclude the Poſſibility of ſupernatural Effects, from the Certainty of natural.

To this may be added, That foraſmuch as Miracles do not neceſſarily imply infinite Power; and we know not what Degrees of Power God may have beſtow'd on ſeveral created Beings, we cannot affirm that the working of Miracles is impoſſible even to them. Only we muſt remember, that whatever Privileges they enjoy in this reſpect, they are ſtill ſubject to The Supreme Being, and limited in the Exerciſe of them by his Will. From whence it follows, that no Confuſions will ariſe from hence: The Adminiſtration of Things may ſtill be God's; and the Force of Miracles the ſame, as tho' they were produc'd by an immediate Divine Power.

If therefore Miracles are not abſolutely impoſſible, we are concern'd to Enquire farther, Whether any ſufficient Reaſon can be aſſign'd for working them. This is the more neceſſary to be done, becauſe I am apprehenſive our Adverſaries build more on this Head than the former. They muſt ſuppoſe that Miracles are Either prejudicial, or uſeleſs; and therefore, inconſiſtent with Goodneſs in the one Caſe, and with Wiſdom in the other.

It cannot be aſſerted that Miracles are prejudicial, without maintaining that ſuch Effects are miſchievous in themſelves or Conſequences. The former we deny; becauſe, if Good may be produc'd in an ordinary Way, it may certainly be as well produc'd in an extraordinary; —— and the latter, becauſe, however true it be in ſome Caſes, that a preſent Advantage may be overballanc'd by future ill Conſequences, yet this is not abſolutely and univerſally neceſſary. Tho' upon the Whole, the preſent Scheme of Things is beſt, and any new Laws might be leſs uſeful than thoſe which obtain already; yet it cannot be affirm'd, that to ſuſpend or counter-act theſe Laws in any particular Inſtances, muſt be miſchievous. To do this, may poſſibly be of ſingular Uſe on ſome Occaſions; and it hath been preſum'd, that certain Irregularities which ariſe from the preſent Conſtitution, (no doubt, the wiſeſt

upon the whole) may be corrected by occaſional Interpoſitions.

The Natural Good of the World is, I conceive, ſecure from any Prejudice on Account of Miracles: Let us ſee therefore, whether any Moral Advantages may be deriv'd from them. If there may, then Miracles may be uſeful; then Reaſons may be aſſign'd for working them; and conſequently, To explode them univerſally, and to make them the Subject of Ridicule, (as this Gentleman has done) is, to ſay the leaſt, raſh and unwarrantable.

Common Appearances, and the ordinary Courſe of Things, according to the preſent Conſtitution, are a ſtrong Argument for a Providence; becauſe, without this Suppoſition, we ſhall be unable to account for thoſe Things which we ſee daily. This, to a Thoughtful and Wiſe Man, may be ſufficient; and, conſequently, extraordinary Admonitions unneceſſary. But the Generality of the World are leſs affected by them. They are not apt to reflect and conſider, or to give any Attention to Matters familiar. Yet, when any Thing very unuſual happens, the Surprize which it occaſions engages them. Things out of the Way, and which cannot be perform'd by Men, will be aſcrib'd to God. Thoſe who overlook'd his Power in the common Adminiſtrations of Providence, will acknowledge it here; and, from hence become more deeply ſenſible of their Depen-

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dance on him, and Obligations to him. Still Miracles will carry a greater Weight, if they ſhall prove either the Rewards of Virtue, or the Puniſhments of Vice; if they ſhall bring any extraordinary Advantages to the Good, or unuſual Calamities on the Wicked. This will alarm them to the Purpoſe, and go much farther towards the Support of Virtue than any Methods merely human can do. I do not, by any Means, affirm how far Miracles have been wrought in Fact, for the End now alledg'd by me; tho' perhaps more frequently than every one is willing to allow. It is enough to aſſert, that the Caſe is in itſelf poſſible; For, if it be, then Miracles are not abſolutely ridiculous.

However, the principal Thing I am concern'd to note is This; Miracles may be proper to confirm the Authority of that Perſon who is commiſſion'd to declare God's Will. That 'tis poſſible for the Supreme Being to reveal himſelf immediately, ſhall be here aſſum'd, becauſe it hath been already ſhewn elſewhere; and, that the Knowledge attainable by this Means may be ſerviceable, as well to Mankind in general, as to any one ſingle Perſon, will be readily admitted, and needs no Proof. Upon this Foot I demand, whether it be neceſſary that this Revelation be immediately made to every one? This cannot be affirm'd, if the Knowledge of it may be communicated

to others, and ſufficient Evidence of a Divine Commiſſion given. For, no one Kind of Means can be affirm'd to be neceſſary, where the End may be obtain'd by ſome other Means. Well then; Immediate Revelation is poſſible; This Revelation made to One may be deſign'd for the Benefit of Others; The Matter of it may be communicated; and ſufficient Evidence of a Divine Commiſſion given: But how ſhall it be given? Certainly by ſome ſupernatural Operations, *i. e.* by Miracles of one Kind or other; For Nothing can be Proof of a Divine Commiſſion but Divine Credentials. If therefore Miracles are proper for this End; and the End itſelf be entirely worthy of God; it remains, that there may be a reaſonable Cauſe of working them; and that they may, (notwithſtanding this Gentleman's Greek Proverb) be applied as convincing Arguments to wiſe Men.

I ſhall now paſs on to the great Queſtion before propos'd, *viz.* Whether any Miracles have been really wrought in Favour of our Religion; And this will farther reſolve itſelf into Two other Queſtions; 1. Whether the Hiſtories from whence we draw our Facts are credible; And 2. Whether the Facts there recorded are Miraculous.

The Hiſtories I have now in View are, The Accounts given us of the Life and Actions of *Jeſus Chriſt* contain'd in the *Four Goſpels*, and of the Conduct of The Apoſtles deliver'd

in

in the *Acts*. In reference to which, it will not be diſputed by our Adverſaries, Whether there was ever ſuch a Perſon as *Jeſus Chriſt*; —— Whether He did not claim the Title of *Meſſias*; —— Whether He did not, under that Character, give out Laws, and inſtitute a Religion; —— Whether He did not gather a conſiderable Number of Followers, from whom He choſe ſome, who were principally employ'd by him to propagate his Religion. Theſe Points I ſhall lay down as indiſputable: So that if the Accounts given us concerning the Lives and Actions of *Chriſt* and his Apoſtles ſhould be thought queſtionable for ſome particular Reaſons, yet the general Foundation of them is abſolutely unqueſtionable. To this may be added, That the Hiſtories before us are not the Forgeries of later Ages, but of great Antiquity, and as old as we Chriſtians pretend they are, may be prov'd in every Way which is allow'd to eſtabliſh the Antiquity of any other Books. They have approv'd themſelves, in this reſpect, to all critical Enquirers: And therefore, if our Adverſaries will, notwithſtanding this, queſtion the Point, They ſhould tell us When, and by whom theſe Books were forg'd; or, at leaſt, produce ſome Arguments, from the Nature and Texture of the Books themſelves, to prove the Forgery. Nothing of this Kind hath yet been done by them, as I am perſuaded Nothing can be done by them.

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We ſhould obſerve, in the next Place, That the Perſons who wrote theſe Hiſtories were ſufficiently qualified for the Undertaking; I mean, That they had all the Advantages which any Hiſtorians ever had, of knowing whether the Matters they related had any ſufficient Foundation in Fact. For, they wrote Accounts of what is ſaid to have happen'd in their own Times; They were Natives of, and reſided in the very Country where the Affairs they relate were tranſacted. And, in many Particulars, they affirm what they were themſelves Witneſſes to. In ſuch Circumſtances as theſe, they muſt either be fully aſſur'd concerning what they wrote, or have been guilty of ſuch Negligence as cannot be imputed to a ſerious and conſidering Man. So far as this goes, few Writers have ever equal'd them, and None exceeded them.

But, our Adverſaries will tell us, The Queſtion doth not reſt here. They will admit perhaps, ſome of them at leaſt, that they knew what they were about; and inſiſt, that they were crafty Impoſtors, who deſign'd to ſupport a falſe Religion by falſe Relations. This bears hard on their moral Character, and we are concern'd to examine it.

But, is there any Evidence for this? Hath it been prov'd, that theſe Writers were infamous Perſons, and ſuch as could not be credited in common Affairs? Nothing of this appears; Nothing to the Diſadvantage of any

any of the Apoſtles but what they themſelves have confeſs'd ingenuouſly. Methinks This ſhould be allow'd ſome Weight, that, in writing theſe Accounts, they did not ſo much as conceal their own Infirmities.

Yet our Adverſaries pretend to take Advantage from hence. The Gentleman I am contending with demands, "Do we not find "one of the Apoſtles, tho' with the reſt he "had the Power of doing Miracles, even to "the raiſing of the Dead, betraying his "Maſter for the paltry Sum of Thirty Pieces "of Silver? and the other Apoſtles not only "fled and deſerted him, but the chief of "them forſwore him as often as he was ask'd "about being one of his Followers: And "He, as well as *Barnabas*, was afterwards "guilty of a mean Piece of Diſſimulation; "And *Paul* and *Barnabas* had ſuch a ſharp "Contention, tho' about a very indifferent "Matter, as to cauſe a Separation. And "even St. *Paul* ſays, *The Good that I would, "I do not; but the Evil which I would not, that "I do. But I ſee another Law in my Members "warring againſt the Law of my Mind, and "bringing me into Captivity to the Law of "Sin which is in my Members.* Do not theſe "Inſtances, tho' many more might be added, "plainly ſhew that inſpir'd Perſons —— are "ſubject to the ſame Paſſions, even to Diſ-"ſembling and Lying, as other Men?" p. 245. This is alledg'd to diſcredit the firſt Propagators

Propagators of our Religion, who (as he inſiſts) ought to have been both infallible and impeccable. [See p. 243.]

Upon this Paſſage I muſt obſerve, that it doth not directly affect the Point I am upon. I am here concern'd to juſtify the Character of the Goſpel Hiſtorians, and to ſhew that they were Perſons who related Matters fairly, according to what they either knew or believed. Suppoſing therefore, they had recorded much greater Faults in the Conduct of thoſe Perſons they wrote of, What, I deſire, could be concluded from thence? That the Hiſtorians deſerv'd no Credit? I ſhould be tempted to think the contrary, from the Freedom they us'd in the Inſtances before us. It is reckon'd in all other Writers a Sign of Impartiality, that they record as well the Errors as Virtues of their Friends.

However, thus much I ſhall acknowledge readily, that, as the Credibility of our Revelation depends on the Evidence of thoſe Facts by which it is ſupported, ſo 'tis neceſſary, not only that the Hiſtorians muſt have been faithful, but the Witneſſes they cite credible; and therefore, if they have really given ſuch Accounts of theſe Witneſſes as ſhall overthrow their Evidence, the Cauſe of our Religion muſt ſuffer by the very Credit we allow to theſe Hiſtorians. This makes it neceſſary that we examine carefully the Characters of theſe Witneſſes.

And

And here I can by no means agree with this Gentleman, that the firſt Propagators of our Religion ought to have been infallible and impeccable. If we conſider them only as Witneſſes to Fact, (as that is the proper Conſideration at preſent) we may put them on the ſame Foot as any other Witneſſes; in whom we do not require an abſolute Infallibility, to gain them Credit. It is ſufficient, if, all Circumſtances laid together, we may fairly conclude they were not deceiv'd in Fact: And, if this be not allow'd, then farewell to all human Teſtimony whatſoever. Nor is it any more neceſſary they ſhould be impeccable. The Queſtion ariſing on this Occaſion muſt be, not Whether the Witneſſes produc'd were abſolutely incapable of deceiving; (This cannot be prov'd demonſtrably of any mere Man) but whether they were Perſons of a general good Character; and Whether there be ſufficient Appearances of Fairneſs in what they teſtify. Let us ſee therefore, Whether, from the Inſtances produc'd by this Author, any Thing can be concluded which will deſtroy the general Credit of theſe Witneſſes.

The Inſtance of *Judas*, who betray'd his Maſter, is of no Conſequence here: For, tho' He, with the reſt of the Apoſtles, was endu'd with a Power of working Miracles, yet it does not appear he was inſpir'd, as this Gentleman is pleas'd to intimate: He was indeed

indeed choſen originally, as the reſt were, to bear Witneſs to *Chriſt*; But he forfeited this Honour by his Perfidy: And it will be Time enough for our Adverſaries to alledge his Miſcarriages, when they find we build any Thing on his Evidence.

The other Perſons here accuſed are, The Diſciples, who deſerted our Saviour in his Extremities; St. *Peter*, who deny'd him; *Barnabas*, who is charg'd with Diſſimulation in one Inſtance, and with Contention in another; and, laſtly, St. *Paul*, who is repreſented as drawing his own Character in a very diſadvantageous Manner.

It is affirm'd by St. *Matthew*, that *the Diſciples forſook their Lord, and fled.* But doth this prove them to have been profligate and infamous Perſons? Is there any more in the Caſe than This; that, upon a very trying Occaſion, they were over-born by the Senſe of Fear, as moſt other Perſons would probably have been in the ſame Circumſtances? Yet afterwards, when they recover'd themſelves, and had receiv'd the laſt Aſſurances of *Chriſt's Meſſiahſhip* by his Reſurrection from the Dead, theſe ſame Perſons behav'd themſelves with the greateſt Reſolution imaginable. Methinks This ſhould be allow'd to be a ſtronger Argument in their Favour, than the having once betray'd a Fear can be againſt them.

As little Streſs can be laid on the Conduct of St. *Peter* and *Barnabas* in the Inſtance which this Gentleman calls a Piece of mean Diſſimulation. The Caſe in ſhort was This; The Apoſtle had convers'd freely with the Gentiles; *But when certain came from James, he withdrew, and ſeparated himſelf, fearing them which were of the Circumciſion,* [Gal. ii. 12.] He was conſcious of his Chriſtian Liberty, and had on former Occaſions ſhewn it; But, being apprehenſive of giving the Jews Offence, he choſe rather to throw up his Liberty than to uſe it. This might have been attended with diſadvantageous Conſequences; However, ſince there appears no Diſhoneſty in the Caſe, the Apoſtle, whoſe Conduct was juſtifiable in the general, may ſurely claim ſome Excuſe.

St. *Barnabas* ſtands on much the ſame Foot with St. *Peter*, as to the foregoing Objection: But it ſeems there is another Charge brought againſt him, in which St. *Paul* likewiſe hath a Share. It relates to a Difference between theſe Two Perſons, where *the Contention was ſo ſharp that they parted.* But, hath the Gentleman never heard of a Miſunderſtanding between great and good Men? or, doth he think they muſt immediately forfeit their Character on ſuch Occaſions? And what, after all, was the Matter of this Difference? Why This; The One inſiſted to take *Mark* with them, which the Other refus'd abſolutely.

ſolutely. The Thing itſelf was Matter of Diſcretion: About which tho' they happen'd to differ, yet it doth not appear that the Contention was criminal. Let the Gentleman make the moſt of this, and ſee whether it will affect the moral Character either of *Paul* or *Barnabas*.

The great Charge on St. *Peter* bears harder: He was forewarn'd of his Danger, repeated his Denial, and confirm'd it with Oaths. The Crime itſelf muſt not be excus'd. But, ſhall One great Fault, committed under the Influence of ſtrong Temptations, render a Man infamous for ever? Can Nothing be done to repair the Miſcarriage, and to recover the good Opinion of the World? If Something may, then let us remember that this unhappy Perſon recollected himſelf immediately; — lamented his Crime bitterly; labour'd afterwards with ſingular Zeal in propagating the Goſpel; and at length laid down his Life for it. What ſurer Signs of Repentance can be given than theſe?

As to what the Gentleman affirms St. *Paul* declares, *Rom.* vii. 19. by which he would intimate that the Apoſtle is there drawing his own Character, I muſt obſerve, that this is ſuch a monſtrous Miſrepreſentation of the Apoſtle as can admit of no Excuſe whatſoever. Doth not St. *Paul*, in ſeveral other Parts of his Writings, inſiſt on the Strictneſs of his paſt Life, and call upon the Jews as Witneſſes

neſſes of what he affirm'd? How then is it credible, that this ſame Perſon ſhould afterwards draw his own Character in a Manner ſo diſadvantageous? But the Gentleman will demand, Are not theſe St. *Paul*'s own Words, *The Good that I would, I do not; but the Evil which I would not, that I do. —— I ſee another Law in my Members warring againſt the Law of my Mind, and bringing me into Captivity to the Law of Sin, which is in my Members?* They are ſo; But the Words are clearly accounted for by Dr. *Sam. Clark*, in his Eighth Volume of Sermons, p. 188. "This "whole Seventh Chapter to the *Romans* is "plainly intended of a Perſon, in his Pro"feſſion not yet Chriſtian, and in his Life "vicious: Which, tho' poſſibly it might "be equally the Caſe either of a Jew or a "Heathen; yet, becauſe the Apoſtle is here "more particularly directing his Diſcourſe "to thoſe of his own Nation, the *Jews*, for "this Reaſon, I ſuppoſe, it is, that, accord"ing to his uſual Method of giving them "as little Offence as poſſible, he intro"duces his Diſcourſe in the firſt Perſon, *v.* 5. "*When we* (We unconverted *Jews*) *were* "*in the Fleſh, the Motions of Sin —— did* "*work in our Members.*"

Hitherto Nothing hath appear'd to diſcredit either the Witneſſes or the Hiſtorians of theſe Facts. Yet this is not all we have to ſay for them; There are ſeveral other Cir-

cumſtances of ſingular Advantage in their Favour.

We muſt obſerve then, that as Men, they were govern'd by the common Principles of human Nature; and conſequently, were under the ſame Influences of Hope and Fear, as other Men are. Can it then be ſuppos'd, they would either contrive or concur in ſuch an Impoſture, without any apparent Advantage? Could they hope to better their Condition this Way, whilſt all Power was in the Hands of their Adverſaries, and which they knew would be employ'd againſt them in full Rigour? Were they taught by their Maſter to entertain any temporal Expectations? On the contrary, Did he not tell them plainly, *If they would follow him, they muſt take up the Croſs*; — *That in this World they muſt expect Tribulation*; *and that the Time was coming, when whoſoever killed them ſhould think he did God Service?* Had not their Maſter himſelf been murthered? and could They expect better Treatment, whilſt they reproach'd the *Jews* with Injuſtice and Cruelty in killing him? Nay, were they not in Fact *perſecuted from City to City*; and were not Matters carried againſt them to ſuch Extremities, that but one ſingle Perſon of all the Apoſtles eſcap'd a violent Death? But, Whence did all this Hatred and Perſecution ariſe? Why, from hence, That they endeavour'd to ſupport a new Religion by the

the Facts they affirm'd. Could they have been prevail'd with to detect the Cheat, or to have unſaid what they had preach'd, or to have been ſilent on that Head, they might have obtain'd any Advantages they could deſire. But had this any Effect on them? No: They ſtill went on courageouſly, *and rejoyced that they were counted worthy to ſuffer for Chriſt's ſake.* Upon this, without alledging numberleſs other Conſiderations to the ſame Purpoſe, I may affirm, That no Writers in any Age, have ever given equal Proofs of Sincerity.

There is but One Way of evading this Evidence, *viz.* by affirming, that theſe Writers were Enthuſiaſts, *i. e.* Mad-men; and, as ſuch, capable of believing any Thing which favour'd the great Point they were poſſeſs'd with. This may be affirm'd: But is there any ſufficient Ground to affirm it? Did theſe Perſons betray any Thing of this Kind in their ordinary Life and Character? Did they not ſupport a rational Scheme of Duty by the Facts they alledg'd; a Scheme, which the very Gentleman I am contending with, owns to be rational as to the Main? Did they not behave with ſingular Diſcretion upon almoſt every trying Occaſion? And are theſe the Marks of Enthuſiaſm? If not, I may conclude, that this is a Suppoſition made purely becauſe Men have Nothing elſe to ſay.

The Point I am upon will be farther ſupported, by conſidering ſome collateral Evidences. To this Purpoſe it may be noted, That as the Facts related are ſaid to have been preach'd every-where immediately after the Aſcenſion of *Chriſt*, ſo the Hiſtories we are ſpeaking of were written and publiſh'd in the very ſame Age; To which may be added another Circumſtance of no inconſiderable Moment, *viz.* That many of the Facts are ſaid to have been done publickly, in the Preſence of Numbers, as well Enemies as Friends. But, would any Men have been ſo ſenſeleſs as to have affirm'd Matters of ſuch a Nature, and under theſe Circumſtances, had there been nothing at all of Truth in them? Would they have publiſh'd to the World ſuch Accounts of Things, at a Time, and in a Place, where the Falſhood might have been eaſily detected? Or, if they had been Fools enough to do this, would they have affirm'd that many of theſe Facts were notorious, when it was in the Power of numberleſs People then alive to have contradicted them? Or, if they had been ſo far infatuated as to run this Risk, Is it poſſible that no One Perſon ſhould ever diſcover the Impoſture? Were the *Jews* ſo very negligent in a Point which concern'd their Religion ſo nearly, and affected the Honour of their Nation ſo much? No doubt but Curioſity muſt have led ſome, and Zeal others,

others, to examine theſe Matters to the Bottom. But did they, after all, diſcover the Cheat? Nothing of this appears: The *Jews* have no Accounts which contradict the Goſpel Hiſtory: There are no Records of any Kind to oppoſe it: So that whatever is affirm'd by our Adverſaries in Oppoſition to this Hiſtory, is affirm'd by them without any manner of Ground, and purely the Effect of their own unjuſt Suſpicions.

It is farther worth while to conſider, that the very Narrations themſelves are ſuch, as are apt to give them Credit, and what we ſhould allow a juſt Weight in any other Writers. There appears nothing of Artifice in the Stories: They are plain and ſimple, and the Accounts ſuch as might be expected to be given of real Facts by honeſt and well-meaning Men. There are Four different Writers of the Hiſtory of *Chriſt*. Theſe have vary'd ſomewhat from each other, and given us Accounts which are not exactly the ſame. But are theſe Differences ſuch as ſhall impair their Credit? Are theſe Hiſtorians found contradicting each other plainly? Do the main Facts related by any one, directly overthrow the Facts mention'd by any other? Is there any other Difference between them, than would be found in the Accounts of any four honeſt Men who ſhould be examin'd about the ſame Affairs? Theſe very Differences, methinks,

heighten their Credit, and prove that they did not write in Concert. After all, Have not moſt of theſe Differences been fairly accounted for? and if ſome Differences ſtill remain, May it not be preſum'd rather that we want ſome Helps towards clearing them up, than that they are abſolutely inſuperable?

I am the more ſtrongly induc'd to preſume ſomething of this Kind, from conſidering, that if there had been no ſufficient Foundation for what theſe Writers have affirm'd, they could not poſſibly have gain'd ſuch Credit, and made ſuch a vaſt Number of Proſelytes. We read, that within a few Days after the Aſcenſion of Chriſt, the Apoſtles *being endued with Power from on High*, preach'd *Jeſus*, and confirm'd what they preach'd *with Signs and Wonders*; immediately upon which Multitudes were converted. It appears from ſeveral following Writers, as well Heathen as Chriſtian, that in a ſhort Time the Chriſtian Religion ſpread itſelf thro' moſt Parts of the *Roman* Empire: Perſons of every Rank and Perſwaſion embrac'd it; and this, notwithſtanding it met with all poſſible Diſcouragement from the Civil Power. But whence could this ariſe? Certainly from the Evidence of the Things alledg'd: Can we think they never enquir'd about theſe Matters; or, that they gave in to this Belief, without any ſufficient Aſſurance about them? This muſt have been

more

more extraordinary than the very Miracles they believ'd. In ſhort, *had this Counſel or this Work been of Men, it muſt have come to nought; but becauſe it was of God, therefore no human Force could overthrow it.*

This leads me to the next Queſtion I propos'd to conſider, *viz.* Whether the Facts recorded in theſe Hiſtories were truly and properly miraculous.

It would be endleſs to inſiſt diſtinctly on each of thoſe extraordinary Facts which are repreſented in the Goſpels: I ſhall only note in general, That all manner of Diſeaſes, even the moſt inveterate, were cured inſtantly, by a Touch, by a Word ſpeaking, and at a Diſtance; That the Dead were rais'd to Life; and that, on a ſudden, Men who had been bred in a low Way, and were known to be illiterate, became perfectly acquainted with all Kinds of Languages. Facts of theſe Kinds muſt be allow'd to be miraculous, if they are free from all Suſpicion of Cheat, and ſhewn to be unaccountable by any natural Powers.

If there were any Thing of Cheat in the Caſe, then, from the very Nature of the Thing, there muſt have been a great Number of Accomplices. The Diſciples doubtleſs were concern'd; The Perſons on whom theſe Facts are ſaid to have been wrought, muſt likewiſe have been intereſted; And, when we conſider that many of the Diſeaſes

ſaid to have been cured, were inveterate and notorious, we muſt farther ſuppoſe no ſmall Party among the Spectators. Had Things of this Kind been done in one Place only, they might have been accounted for more eaſily: But foraſmuch as *Jeſus Chriſt* travell'd about from Place to Place, *healing the Sick, and caſting out Devils*, there could be no Deceit, without ſuppoſing that the Plot was carry'd on at once in almoſt all Parts of *Judea*. But is this credible? Could a Perſon of low Education form a Deſign ſo vaſt, or conduct it ſo ſucceſsfully? Is it conceivable, that a Man without Wealth, Power, or Intereſt, could ſeduce ſo vaſt a Number in almoſt every City? Or if this might have been, Is it credible that not one of theſe Accomplices ſhould ever betray the Cheat? Did thoſe who were employ'd in gaining Accomplices ſucceed in every Application? If not, whence was it that the whole Deſign was not blaſted at once? I muſt conclude therefore, there was no Deceit in accompliſhing theſe Facts, becauſe from the Circumſtances of Things there could be none.

One Thing farther may be be obſerv'd in reference to the Spectators in general; Theſe muſt know whether the Perſons pretended to be heal'd of inveterate Diſeaſes, had really labour'd under them, or not; and if they had, whether they were really cured, or not; They

They muſt know, ſeveral of them at leaſt, whether Perſons ſaid to have been rais'd had been really dead, and whether after this they were really alive: And, laſtly, whether the Apoſtles were really illiterate Perſons; and if they were, whether they did (as 'tis affirm'd they did) on a ſudden ſpeak to every Man in his proper Tongue. If Men cannot be certain in ſuch Caſes as theſe, they cannot be ſufficiently aſſur'd of any Thing. This reſted on the Evidence of their Senſes, and to this Evidence we appeal.

As little Difficulty will there be in proving that theſe Works were ſtrictly ſupernatural. I think it is very plain that they could not be wrought by any mere human Skill or Power. If Diſeaſes may be heal'd this Way, yet this cannot be done in an Inſtant; It cannot be done without the Uſe of ſuitable Means, much leſs without the Uſe of any Means at all: No natural Agents can work at a Diſtance; Nor can Effects of this Kind be produc'd merely by a Command. The Dead cannot be rais'd to Life by thoſe who are unable to beſtow Life; Nor, can Men of themſelves ſpeak Languages they never learn'd, and perhaps ſcarce ever heard before. Theſe Things are too evident to need Enlargements; And therefore, if the Relations given of theſe Facts, with all their ſeveral Circumſtances, be juſt, the Concluſion I would draw is certain. Every Effect requires

ſome

ſome Cauſe proportionable to it; and that which cannot be produc'd in a natural way, muſt be ſupernatural.

After all, if there be any Evaſion remaining, it muſt be This; That we are not perfectly acquainted with all the ſeveral Powers of Nature; That if we knew all the ſimple Powers, yet we might be Strangers to their ſeveral Compoſitions: And therefore, as we cannot ſay What their Reſults may be, ſo we cannot determine What is ſtrictly and properly ſupernatural.

This Allegation muſt be vain, if we conſider, That 'tis unreaſonable to ſuppoſe any Effects to be natural, which cannot be accounted for in ſome natural Way; at leaſt, where there are no Grounds to preſume that they are really owing to ſome latent Powers in Nature: Such are thoſe, of which we have never had any certain Inſtances either before or ſince theſe Times; and eſpecially, if they have directly contradicted the known and ſtanding Laws of Nature. Or, if it ſhould be imagin'd that ſome of the Effects might poſſibly ariſe from unknown Powers; yet ſince theſe very Powers are ſuppos'd to be unknown, the Facts, as they ſtand in theſe Hiſtories, will be ſtill miraculous. Put the Caſe of Diſeaſes being cured in an Inſtant; You will ſay, This might poſſibly happen by ſome lucky Coincidence of natural Cauſes, of which we know

know nothing. Very well: But if this were really unknown, How came our Saviour and his Apoſtles to apply, with ſuch Succeſs, this Coincidence of Cauſes to their own proper Purpoſes? How came they to repeat this ſo frequently, and to ſucceed conſtantly? To ſay, *Be thou heal'd*, and to have the Effect ſucceed immediately, where 'tis ſuppos'd that the ſeveral Circumſtances really conducing to the Effect, are unknown, is itſelf a Miracle of the higheſt Nature. It argues, that the Speaker was directed by a Knowledge ſupernatural, tho' the Effect itſelf ſhould be ſtrictly natural.

It remains that I Enquire, What Force there is in the Argument deduc'd from hence in Favour of our Religion. This, one might think, could be no Matter of Enquiry. If the Facts themſelves are ſupernatural, the Religion confirm'd by them muſt be ſo likewiſe. The Concluſion is plain, and hardly capable of being render'd plainer by any manner of Repreſentation. This hath been allow'd by ſober Men in all former Ages; who, tho' they have queſtion'd, and in many Caſes juſtly queſtion'd the Reality of the Facts, have thought, if this be once admitted, the Conſequence deduc'd from it muſt be certain. However, Difficulties have of late been pretended; and theſe muſt be examin'd before I cloſe this Head.

What

What hath been alledg'd to this Purpoſe is, 1. That Miracles being nothing more than Facts, can prove nothing but the Operation of ſome ſupernatural Power capable of producing them; And that as there is no neceſſary Connexion between Miracles and Truths, ſo we cannot conclude the Truth of a Religion from the Miracles alledg'd for it. 2. That foraſmuch as Miracles may be wrought as well by ſubordinate Beings as the ſupreme, as well by Evil Spirits as by Good; ſo we cannot depend on any Arguments drawn from thence, unleſs we have ſome certain Way of diſcovering what are Divine Miracles, and what Otherwiſe; at leaſt, what are the Effects of a Good Power, and what of an Evil one.

As to the former Objection, I muſt allow, that Miracles are indeed Facts, which of themſelves prove Nothing more than the Agency of ſome Cauſe proportionable; and that as there is no neceſſary Connexion between Miracles and Truths, ſo Miracles are of themſelves no Evidence of Truths. But then I muſt affirm, That Things which are not neceſſarily, and in their own Nature Signs, may yet become ſuch by the Application; and conſequently, That Things may become the Proofs of Truth, which have no neceſſary Connexion with that Truth.

This will be plain, if we conſider that Words ſpoken, are in themſelves nothing more

more than Sounds modify'd in a certain manner, between which and the Ideas they ſtand for in Speaking there is no Connexion at all. How then comes it to paſs, that Men communicate their Thoughts to each other this Way? The Caſe is, Words which are not eſſentially Signs, are capable of being us'd as ſuch; To this Purpoſe they have been and are apply'd: And conſequently, where we are entirely ſecure of the Speaker's Honeſty, we no more doubt his Sentiments expreſs'd by Words, than we ſhould tho' inwardly conſcious to his Thoughts. The ſame may be obſerv'd concerning another Uſage, *viz.* That of Seals. There is no neceſſary Connexion between the Uſe of theſe, and the Confirmation of a Bargain: Yet ſtill, the uſual Import of theſe being known, Men receive as full Satisfaction from them, as they would if they had been in their own Nature expreſſive of the Thing they ſignify.

To apply this to our preſent Purpoſe. Miracles are directly no more than Evidences of a ſupernatural Power: But when wrought at the Inſtance of Men, and apply'd by them as Evidences of a ſupernatural Commiſſion, they carry with them the Nature of Seals, and are properly the Confirmation of that Authority they are alledg'd to ſupport. Let us then ſuppoſe a Perſon claiming ſuch an Authority as commiſſion'd by a ſupernatural

natural Power: To ſupport this Claim, Miracles are wrought, *i. e.* Works which argue the Interpoſition of ſuch a Power; What can we conclude but the Reality of a Commiſſion deriv'd from him who wrought theſe Miracles. The Conſequence is plain; If the Perſon who wrought them had a Right to our Submiſſion, the Perſon on whoſe Account they were wrought muſt have it likewiſe.

But this Kind of Arguing, our Adverſaries will tell us, muſt be uſeleſs, becauſe ſuch Miracles may be wrought as well by Subordinate Beings as the Supreme, as well by Evil Spirits as Good. See how the Gentleman I am contending with repreſents the Matter. "If Evil Beings can impreſs Notions on Mens Minds as ſtrongly as Good "Beings, and cauſe Miracles to be done in "Confirmation of them; is there any way "to know to which of the two, Notions "thus impreſs'd are owing, but their Nature "and Tendency, or thoſe internal Marks "of Wiſdom and Goodneſs by which they "plainly ſhew themſelves to be a Part of "natural Religion? If ſo, can external "Proofs carry us farther than internal Proofs "do?" p. 243.

What direct Power Evil Beings may poſſibly have on the Minds of Men, I pretend not to determine, nor, conſequently, in how ſtrong a Manner they may be capable of impreſſing

impreſſing Notions on them. Only thus much I muſt obſerve, That our Author is very bold, in ſuppoſing that the Senſe of a Divine Impulſe can be founded on Nothing elſe than the Strength and Livelineſs of the Impreſſion. This he can have no Authority for affirming. I ſhould think it much ſafer to leave this Matter in the dark, being confident of this alone, That if God ſhould ever vouchſafe to make Impreſſions on Mens Minds, he would do it in ſuch a Manner, (whatever that be), as ſhould leave no Room to doubt the Author of the Impreſſion. And if this may be, then there will be ſufficient Difference between the Inſpirations of God, and the Infuſions of the Devil.

But the Point I am moſt concern'd with here, is this; Miracles may be wrought as well by Evil Beings as Good; and conſequently alledg'd as well to confirm an Impoſture, as a Truth: If ſo, How ſhall we diſtinguiſh from what Cauſe theſe Miracles proceed; and yet, without this, all Arguments drawn from Miracles muſt be precarious.

In Reply, I muſt obſerve, That there are Two Methods ſerviceable to this Purpoſe, in the proper Uſe of which Men cannot eaſily miſcarry.

1. The Nature of the Doctrines which Miracles are alledg'd to confirm, muſt be conſider'd; becauſe, if theſe are inconſiſtent with

with any certain and known Truths, they are incapable of Proof: No Miracles can, in ſuch a Caſe, be of any Force; and therefore, if ſuch are really wrought, we muſt conclude that they did not proceed from the God of Truth, but the Author of Lyes.

But if, upon ſuch a Conſideration, every Thing ſhall appear clear; *i. e.* If there be no Contradiction in the Doctrines themſelves, nor Inconſiſtency with any certain Truth, then, (for any Thing we know to the contrary), they may be true; and if ſo, then they may be capable of ſufficient Evidence from Proof external. There is no manner of Occaſion, (as our Author contends there is), that theſe Matters ſhould be prov'd by the internal Evidence of the Thing, or that they ſhould ſhew themſelves to be Parts of natural Religion by Marks of Wiſdom and Goodneſs, of which every one is not capable of judging. If this were neceſſary, then external Proofs could carry us no farther than internal Proofs do; Then Miracles could have no Force, but where ſuch Force is uſeleſs; and conſequently, the working them for this Purpoſe muſt be unaccountable. But the Deſign of Miracles is, to ſupply the Want of internal Evidence, with regard to Matters capable of being confirm'd; and this Force they will have, if we can get ſufficient farther Aſſurance that they are not wrought by the Interpoſition of malicious Beings.

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To this Purpoſe, it ſhould be enquir'd, 2. Whether the Miracles wrought, are oppos'd by any other Miracles alledg'd to prove the contrary; and if they are, then it ſhould be conſider'd on which Side there is the greateſt Evidence of Power. The Caſe of *Moſes* and the Magicians determines the Point clearly: The Pretenſions on both Sides were to be try'd by Miracles, *i. e.* by Inſtances of ſupernatural Power: Theſe were alledg'd by both as Evidence: It is plain therefore, that the moſt extraordinary Inſtances were the ſtrongeſt Evidence: The Magicians allow'd it, and confeſs'd the Finger of God.

But if the Miracles in this Caſe wrought to confirm a Commiſſion are unoppos'd by any other Miracles, then we may conclude ſafely that they are, and muſt be in ſome Senſe from God; They muſt be wrought, either by his own immediate Power, or, (which amounts to much the ſame,) by his Appointment. This muſt be concluded from the eſſential Perfections of the Divine Nature. They are (as hath been ſhewn already) Inſtances of ſupernatural Power; and therefore, being urg'd to confirm a Divine Authority, would never have been permitted by God, had the Perſon who alledg'd them no ſuch Authority, and were there no other Means whereby the Fraud might be detected. No Earthly Prince would permit his Name and Authority to be uſurp'd, without taking ſome

Methods to vindicate his Honour: Much leſs would he lay his Subjects under the unhappy Neceſſity of acting contrary to his Will, even whilſt they are moſt deſirous of obeying it entirely. We deny not but there may be Powers in ſeveral created Beings of working Miracles; and in what Inſtances God may permit them to exerciſe theſe Powers we cannot ſay preciſely: Yet, this we may be bold to affirm, that He will not ſuffer them to interpoſe to the Prejudice of his own Authority, becauſe it is inconſiſtent with his Wiſdom; nor to delude Mankind unavoidably in the moſt important Affairs, becauſe it is irreconcileable with his Goodneſs.

Upon the Whole then, If the Goſpel Hiſtories are faithful Records; If the Facts there recorded were real Facts, and not mere Illuſions; If they were properly miraculous, and alledg'd to ſupport the Divine Authority of our Religion; If in this Religion there are no Articles incapable of being prov'd, *i. e.* inconſiſtent with any of the certain Concluſions of Reaſon; And if, Laſtly, the Miracles wrought to confirm this Religion have never been oppos'd by greater, nor indeed by any other Miracles at all, then I muſt conclude that this Religion is really from God.

I have now gone through with what was propos'd at firſt. I have endeavour'd to ſupport the Cauſe of Revelation againſt the Reaſonings of this Gentleman, under the

ſeveral

ſeveral Articles heretofore produc'd, and am not aware I have left any Thing unexamin'd, which was proper to be conſider'd, and fell within the Compaſs of my Deſign. I muſt confeſs indeed, I have not enter'd into a particular Defence of certain Doctrines, againſt which he hath rather inſinuated Objections than urg'd them: This I have omitted, not only becauſe the Points themſelves have been frequently conſider'd by other Writers, but likewiſe becauſe The Gentleman expreſſes himſelf in ſo very looſe a Manner, that 'tis difficult to ſay in what Senſe he is willing to be underſtood. If he expects to be conſider'd on thoſe Heads, I muſt deſire him to explain himſelf more diſtinctly; and then, if he calls on me, I ſhall be ready to attend him. At preſent I take my Leave, with this Obſervation only, That a Debate concerning *Natural* and *Reveal'd* Religion ought to be carried on by Methods conſiſtent with *Natural* Religion at leaſt. I hope I have not offended this Way: How far the Gentleman I have been concern'd with, can ſay the ſame, let the World judge.

The END.

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Nay, but, O Man, who art thou that replieſt againſt God? Rom. ix. 20.

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Nullo modo cogimur, aut retentâ præſcientiâ Dei, tollere voluntatis arbitrium, aut retento voluntatis arbitrio, Deum, quod nefas eſt, negare præſcium futurorum: ſed utrumque amplectimur, utrumque fideliter & veraciter confitemur. Illud, ut bene credamus; hoc, ut bene vivamus. Aug. de Civ. Dei, l. 5. c. 10.

As for *Socinus*'s Reſolution, That God foreſees only Things foreſeeable, and that Contingents are not ſuch, but only thoſe that come to paſs by his Decree, I conceive it is as dangerous as Mr. *Calvin*'s, that he predetermines all things, and it

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